THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR:

A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY MEANINGS AND VALUES FOR RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

Broadly, this thesis is concerned with the symbolic meanings and values of places. In particular, my primary concern is to find out the meanings and values of religious buildings for different groups of people and I have chosen to examine this using multi-religious but officially secular Singapore as a case study. Specifically, my study objectives are as follows: first, to find out the symbolic meanings and values of religious buildings for individuals of the major religious groups in Singapore, namely the Muslims, Christians, Hindus and "Chinese religionists"; second, to analyse the state's conceptions of religious buildings in Singapore and the roles it plays in shaping religious landscapes; and third, to examine the extent to which the state's conceptions of religious places coincide, complement or conflict with the meanings invested by religious individuals and groups, and with what effect.

The central argument of my thesis is that individuals invest a multitude of meanings in their religious buildings which are intensely sacred, personal and social in nature. Conversely, there are two levels at which the state deals with religious buildings. They are political symbols in that they are used to endorse political rhetoric about state support for religion. At the same time, religious buildings are also treated within a functionalist framework of planning whereby provisions are made for religious buildings within new towns just as provisions are made for schools, housing, town centres, playgrounds and so forth. Demolition takes place as urban redevelopment takes precedence over other values. When this happens, the state then attempts to use ideologically hegemonic arguments to persuade people that these are natural and rational ways of dealing with religious buildings. Clearly, sacred meanings and personal and social attachments have no place in the state's scheme of things. Individuals are then faced with a situation where they will have to resist and/or cope. I examine both the strategies of resistance and the forms of adaptations adopted by

various groups and individuals.

In conceptual terms, I draw from four broad research directions. From humanistic geography, I adopt concepts related to human environmental experiences. From the history of religion and the comparative study of religion, I derive conceptual notions of religious experience and religious symbolism. Sociology, political studies and in particular, the "new" cultural geography, offer useful insights into cultural politics and ideological landscapes. Finally, planning theory provides some of the input necessary to an understanding of the production and annihilation of place.

Methodologically, I have used a variety of approaches. These include, first, an extensive questionnaire survey to establish the broad trends in patterns of religious worship in Singapore. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with a much smaller number of individuals from the various religious groups, including religious functionaries, for more intensive information about meanings and values. Third, official documents and transcripts of public discourses by state representatives were analysed. Together with interviews with some state representatives (planners, bureaucrats and a politician), they allow me to interpret state conceptions of religious places.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

1.1 Defining the study objectives

The study of religion has engaged the attention of a large and ever-widening circle of scholars in both the social sciences and the humanities. Many of the important works which have shaped the development of "religious thinking" can be attributed to scholars professing a range of diverse disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history, in addition to theology. The works of Weber (1904-05), Durkheim (1915), Otto (1917) and Eliade (1957) represent but a sample of these multifarious writings. Given such diversity of interests and perspectives, what contributions can geographers make to the study of religion? Geographical research on religion exists in fair abundance but has remained relatively obscure, paradoxical though this may seem. At the same time, while cultural geographers have recently claimed the study of language, race and gender issues (Jackson, 1989) and contributed some innovative work, the same degree of innovation has not been displayed in relation to religion. In fact, many geographical questions focusing on religion have not been explored. It is in this wider setting that my work is cast.

Specifically, my research is anchored in the study of religious places and reflects two broader issues within geographical analysis. The first forms part of my larger concern with human relationships with places and focuses primarily on how individuals relate to religious places. In this context, I am especially curious about the meanings and values of religious places for "ordinary" people; the feelings evoked by such places; and the attachments people form with them. This interest reflects my

belief that in a lot of existing geographical research, individual people and their intangible but often deeply important emotions and attachments, elude analysis because such feelings appear to be difficult to grasp and pin down.

My second interest concerns the multi-religious character of societies; in particular, the social and political relationships between different religious communities, and relations between religious communities and secular forces. In this respect, I also focus on religious places as a way of understanding the relationships at work in the wider social and political context, a reflection of the broader geographical view that "landscape is a social product" (Cosgrove, 1985:14). This interest is prompted by the realisation that individuals do not exist in a vacuum and that religion is often not simply a relationship between each individual and his/her deity/deities. Any understanding of individuals and their experiences with religious places can therefore only be possible when set in the appropriate socio-political context.

My geographical concern with space and place is anchored in the argument that these concepts are particularly important in thinking about abstractions like culture, ideology and religion. It is in space and the material forms of place that such abstractions take on physical existence and representation. As Gilsenan (1982:187) argued, "material forms embody, reinforce and order universes of power and belief." Using these arguments and my specific interests as a framework, a wide range of research possibilities exist. For instance, questions arise about what sort of meanings and values are invested in religious places by different groups, and how these respective meanings may be conflicting or mutually reinforcing. Should these meanings conflict, how do the various groups consciously or unconsciously reconcile the differences, if at all? Also pertinent would be a set of questions about how space is used for religious purposes, negotiations over such use, and changes over time.

This raises questions about the relative negotiating powers of different groups and in particular, the balance of power between different religious groups, as well as between religious groups, planners and politicians. In any attempt to tackle these issues, analysis can be conducted at a variety of levels. First, the meanings and values of religious places for the "ordinary" individual can be examined. Second, research can focus on identifying the power-holders and the roles they play in influencing the use of space for religious purposes. Analysis may then include the role of the state, the planning context in which material forms take shape, and the relative power of religious functionaries, groups and individuals to negotiate for religious sites.

Using these broad questions as a guide, I have chosen to undertake a geographical examination of religion focusing on one particular case study -- the multi-religious but officially secular state of Singapore. My specific study objectives are to explore the following questions:

1. What are the symbolic meanings and values of places of worship (churches, temples and mosques) for individuals who are members of the major religious groups in Singapore, namely the Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Chinese religionists[1]?

2. What are the state's[2] conceptions of religious places in Singapore and how are these conceptions translated in state policies pertaining to religious landscapes?

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[1] I use the term "Chinese religionists" to include Buddhists, Taoists, Confucianists, and "ancestor worshippers", as well as those who profess a syncretic mix of some or all of them. The nature of this eclectic group will be explained more fully in Chapter Three.

[2] I use the term "state" to refer to a unitary body, comprising inter alia the government and the bureaucracy. The focus is on the "office" rather than the office-holders. In other words, I am not concerned with individuals and their individual beliefs and unofficial views, but with official policies and actions. A fuller exposition of my use of the term is available in Chapter Six where the focus is on the state's conceptions of religious places.

3. Focusing on the state-individual-group nexus, to what extent do the state's, individuals' (and collectively, groups') conceptions of religious places, and the symbolic meanings which each attach to these places coincide, complement, or conflict, and with what effects?

Through this specific case study of Singapore, I will address certain theoretical, methodological and policy issues. On all three counts, the approaches I take here represent both continuity and change. There is continuity because while there are problems with existing approaches which I will highlight below and in subsequent chapters, I am not ready to throw the baby out with the bath water. This indeed is the danger which Rowntree (1988:582) cautioned against in his progress report on cultural geography. As he pointed out, there is a tendency in the evolution of ideas to "privilege the new over the old" and to "sever connections with the past" (Rowntree, 1988:582). Therefore, rather than rejecting all existing theoretical, methodological and policy positions, I incorporate elements of existing thinking while building on them and adopting other perspectives hitherto little or un-used by geographers interested in religion and policy-makers. In subsequent sections, I will provide an overview of the specific ways in which my ideas and methods either build on or depart from traditional perspectives.

1.2 A brief introduction to existing research

To cast my study within the context of other academic research, I will offer a brief introduction to existing work on religious places. With a few exceptions, the focus on religious space and place has been ignored in other social science disciplines. Eliade (1957), the historian of religions, is one non-geographer who has dealt with sacred and profane space but he considers the nature and characteristics of such space rather than its links with the social and political world. Eliade is preoccupied with the

idea that every religious place is a paradigmatic model of the macrocosmos: that is, the idea that such places in the world of humans are patterned after the domain of the gods. He proceeds from this basis to examine the religious symbolism of places, such as the symbolic meanings of sacred poles in aboriginal societies, the meanings of a temple's morphological structure, and those of a sanctuary. On the other hand, some anthropologists such as Gilsenan (1982) recognise that there are in fact two levels of symbolism relating to religious places. One may be found in the physical form of religious buildings, for example, the symbolism of the dome and minaret in a mosque. This is closely similar to Eliade's analysis of religious symbolism. In addition, Gilsenan also recognised another level: the importance of religious buildings in portraying symbolically the politics and local structures of power and authority. This recognition that there are multiple layers of symbolic meanings attached to religious places is an important starting point for my study.

Within geography, the perspective that I have chosen to focus on is not a well-established part of traditional research. Instead, existing empirical studies of religion have largely concentrated on the role of religion in effecting landscape change. In these studies, religion, like culture in traditional cultural geography, is often treated as superorganic. It is regarded as a static transcendental category, an unseen force that shapes landscapes and spatial patterns. Part of the problem arises from conceptualising "religion" as a given category rather than addressing "the religious", which can be broken down into its component parts -- the practices, values, meanings and beliefs of individuals and groups. Yet, "religion" is not a faceless force and only gathers meaning in relation to people. One way in which I shall avoid reifying "religion" is by discussing the meanings and values of religious places for individual human beings.

Traditional research is also concerned with isolating religious influences from other social, economic and political forces at work. Typical of existing research is Isaac's (1961-62:12) view that the task of a geography of religion is "... to separate the specifically religious from the social, economic and ethnic matrix in which it is embedded, and to determine its relative weight in relation to other forces in transforming the landscape". However, I would argue quite the opposite view: there is a need to trace the specific links between religion and society, and to show how the various forces are played out in the landscape. My study objectives once again reflect this concern with linking religion to, rather than isolating it from, other aspects of society. This is evident in my attempt to understand the secular state's conceptions of religious places and their role in influencing the use of space for the practice of religion.

A third characteristic of existing empirical work is the neglect of personal experiences with religious places. This can largely be traced to the view that the realm of the personal does not fall within the geographer's metier. Sopher (1967), for example, in his oft-cited Geography of Religions, stated explicitly that "Geography cannot deal with the personal religious experience" but only with "organized religious systems and culturally molded and institutionalized religious behavior." This stems from his overall conception of cultural geography as a discipline "concerned with man (sic), not as an individual, but as a sharer and bearer of culture" (Sopher, 1967:1). Such a conception places individuals in a passive role, subject to the forces of culture and acting under its influences. It also denies that culture is a way of life for individuals and that studies in cultural geography can and should deal with culture at the level of everyday existence for individuals. The view that the personal should be left out of geographical analysis is also echoed by Levine (1986:431) who stated that "the primary focus of the geography of religion lies not in the study of the

individual religious experience, but, rather, centres on religion in an instituted, social form." Such a view not only limits the geographer's research agenda unnecessarily, it is also unrealistic in disregarding one very important aspect of religious experience, that which is personal (as opposed to social and institutionalised). Perhaps Sopher's and Levine's arguments against studying personal experiences reflect the wider neglect of environmental experience in geographical studies. As Tuan (1977:6) put it,

> People tend to suppress that which they cannot express. If an experience resists ready communication, a common response among activists ("doers") is to deem it private -- even idiosyncratic -- and hence unimportant.

Many academic geographers have all too readily consigned religion, particularly at the level of deeply personal and intangible individual experience, to the level of experiences which "resist ready communication" and have hence failed to explore many issues related to religion. However, people can and do communicate their religious experiences, and my study seeks to address precisely this level of the individual, personal and intangible.

Amidst the shortcomings of existing empirical research, there is one positive aspect which should be emphasised and that is the implicit recognition of the importance of place and time specificity when dealing with religions and religious structures. Hence, studies which focus on yard shrines in the Cuban quarter in Miami (Curtis 1980) and Belgian roadside chapels in Wisconsin (Laatsch and Calkins, 1986) are significant in that they illustrate the importance of the local place in influencing the form of universal religions, not least through syncretism with local beliefs. As Williams (1977:80-1) argued, analytic categories (such as class and religion) are often treated as substantive categories in social science while in fact, they should be a matter for historical and place-specific analysis rather than a priori theory.

Hence, the sense in which "Catholic" and "Buddhist" are used, for instance, seldom pays explicit attention to the fact that these are not simply analytic categories that mean the same thing everywhere. Particular beliefs and values which, though generally shared by other Catholics or Buddhists elsewhere, are also mediated through the particularities of place and the specificities of history. This argument is repeated in a different way by Ling (1987:11) who suggested that in Asia, the term "Buddhist" "has no constant heuristic value", for "it is necessary to be contextually specific, or possibly 'country-specific'. A Thai Buddhist will have a somewhat different religious perspective from a Ceylon Buddhist, and each of these will have a different perspective from a Burmese Buddhist or a Chinese Buddhist or a Tibetan Buddhist." In my case study of Singapore and the various religious groups, such place and time specificity must constantly be borne in mind.

Apart from empirical work, geographers of religion have not paid much attention to theoretical and conceptual issues (Levine, 1986). Instead, when considering the nature of the field, they have concerned themselves first, with attempts to define the central focus for geographers of religion and second, to debate the question of whether geographers of religion should also be trained in religionswissenschaft, meaning "history of religions" or "comparative study of religions" (although neither is a satisfactory equivalent of the German term) (Buttner, 1974:165). In attempting to define the field, geographers have established two positions. One is that the geography of religion should focus on the "part played by the religious motive in man's (sic) transformation of the landscape" (Isaac, 1959-60:14) -- a possibilist view. Another is that it should focus on the influence of the environment on religion -- a determinist stance. These are however over-simplistic polarisations: they do not take into account any interaction between religion and the environment, and they neglect other variables which have undoubted influence on this relationship (politics and social structure for

instance). Fortunately though, some geographers have begun to highlight this over-simplification (Buttner, 1974, 1980; and Levine, 1986), and my study will demonstrate that it is not possible to disregard the wider socio-political context in the study of religious space and place -- not least because meanings and values are never formed in a vacuum.

In the debate about whether geographers of religion should also be trained in religionswissenschaft, Troll (cited in Buttner, 1980:96) and Schwind (cited in Sopher, 1981:511) have argued that it would lead geographers into an "interdisciplinary limbo" in which work produced would be neither what geographers "should do" nor what the religionswissenschaftler can satisfactorily do. On the other hand, others (Isaac, 1961-62:17; Licate, 1967:18; and Buttner, 1980:105, 107) view it as essential because it would then allow geographers to place their special research within a wider perspective, as well as incorporate relevant research findings and methods of the other discipline. To me, to deny that there is a need for some knowledge of religionswissenschaft is an unhealthily purist view of disciplinary divisions and reflects the wider concern about what constitutes geography, characterised by Sauer (1941:4) as the "pernicious anemia of the 'but-is-this-geography' state". I take the view that an understanding of religions is essential because it then provides the codes or rules through which to understand the meanings and actions of different religious groups. Certainly, in my empirical study, it would not be possible to discuss some of the symbolic meanings and values of religious places without at least a little understanding of the religious codes and beliefs of the people.

In terms of research on my empirical setting, there are many studies on various aspects of religion in Singapore but few focus explicitly on religious places. Thematic concerns range from a study of the changing functions of mosques (Mansor Sukaimi,

1983; and Siddique, 1990) and the architectural styles of churches (Tan, 1979/80) to the symbolic themes in temple structure and decorations (Lip, 1978, 1981, 1983; Kwang, 1982/83). While these are only a sample of the writings, they share a common feature with other studies -- a neglect of the meanings and values of churches, temples and mosques for "ordinary" people. Further, none has addressed the ways in which religious landscapes in Singapore are shaped by the wider social and political contexts.

To sum up, there is a dearth of research on the contemporary meanings and values of religious places in general and specifically, in the context of Singapore. The small number of relevant studies also provide little by way of conceptual and methodological directions for my research questions. Therefore, in attempting to pull together a conceptual framework for my study, I have had to turn to a variety of sources. The next section will offer an overview of the various strands that form the conceptual foundations of my study, as well as some of the attendant methodological implications.

1.3 An overview of theoretical and methodological issues

Bearing in mind my study objectives, the theoretical basis of my thesis is derived from four different sources. First, the humanistic perspective that emerged in geography as a reaction to the positivistic school of the 1950s and 1960s is valuable for its emphasis on the centrality of the human being, the experiences of the individual and the meanings and values attached to places. Concepts such as "topophilia" (Tuan, 1974a), "genius loci" (Lowenthal and Prince, 1965) and "sense of place" (Tuan, 1974b) were introduced in the writings of a few geographers and began

to gather importance in the geographical lexicon. Subsequent research explored people's affective ties with the environment and sought to understand what it was that gave rise to the human being's profound attachment to place. These ideas provide a useful frame of reference for the study of the individual's attachment to religious places. At the same time, because my focus is specifically on people's investment of meanings in and attachments to religious places, a second conceptual focus revolves around the notions of sacredness, sacred experiences and religious symbolism. In this respect, the conceptual contributions of scholars of religion towards understanding the nature of religious experiences are useful starting points, as are studies of the meanings of religious symbols. For example, Otto (1917) and James (1902) analyse the nature of religious experiences, introducing ideas such as the "numinous", "religious awe", "religious fear" and so on. When combined with humanistic understanding of place attachments, relationships between individuals and their religious places can be better understood.

While both these perspectives provide important theoretical anchors for my study, they are inadequate by themselves. Particularly in the case of humanistic analysis and the focus on personal religious experiences, the tendency is to over-emphasise individuality, resulting in a neglect of the social and political contexts in which people exist and face constraints. In recognition of these contexts and constraints, I incorporate into my conceptual framework two other themes. The first draws primarily, though not solely, from the "new" cultural geography and its recognition of cultural politics while the second derives from planning theory.

The "new" cultural geography takes issue with the concept of a unitary Culture and replaces it with explicit recognition that all societies are composed of a plurality of culture groups with differing, often antagonistic interests. Hence, just as it is

insufficient to examine individuals separately when they come together as a group, and just as it is important to consider inter-group dynamics, it is unsatisfactory to study a religious group in a plural society as if it exists in isolation from other social groups. Recognising the plurality of cultures is thus a recognition of the social context in which religious groups exist. It is also a recognition of the political context and specifically, the importance of cultural politics which up till now, have largely been ignored. This calls for a study of the ways in which meanings are negotiated and contested according to the interests of the different culture groups involved, for example between black and white cultures. It also calls for explicit attention to be paid to the ways in which relations of dominance and subordination between different groups are defined and contested. These issues have all been discussed in the recent self-conscious reconstruction of a "new" cultural geography but while attention has been paid to a variety of cultures (black and white, masculine and feminine, gay and straight, popular and elite), little that is explicitly geographical has been said of the plurality of religious groups. This is also true of the cultural studies literature (research at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham for example) where the emphasis has been on race, class and gender rather than religion. The main sources of most cultural studies and "new" cultural geography (such as feminism and Marxism) have also failed to address religion directly.[3]

The reconstruction of cultural geography has led to full recognition of the

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[3] Marx did of course deal with religion, although he never studied it in any detail. His influence is strong primarily amongst sociologists where his view that religion is the "opium of the masses" has been widely discussed. However, in cultural studies and the "new" cultural geography, Marxism has influenced the analysis of different class cultures and relationships rather than the relationships between religious groups, or between secular and religious interests. Levine's (1986) call for a historical materialist approach to the geographical study of religion, however, is an exceptional example. As for feminism, there has been work done on the prescribed roles of women in various religions (for example, Carmody, 1989) but again, geographers have not researched gender and religious issues.

usefulness of concepts such as "ideology" and "hegemony", particularly in the sense of how meanings are manipulated for the purposes of political and social control (Cosgrove, 1986). Specifically, some cultural geographers now argue that symbolism in the built environment can serve to legitimise the dominant ideology and power system within society. For those with a structural Marxist bent -- in particular, those who subscribe to the most economistic forms of Marxism -- this has been taken to an extreme to mean that the mode of production (capitalism) determines the realm of attitudes, ideas, values and perceptions which find form in the built environment. Privileging the economic base over the cultural superstructure is a form of crude reductionism and consigns culture to a subordinate place, acting as no more than the reflection of economic forces. It is precisely such a view of a "determining base" and a "determined superstructure" (Williams, 1980:31) that has attracted criticism from geographers such as Duncan and Ley (1982) and led them to reject structural Marxism because of its over-simplification. While I too reject such crude reductionism, I agree with the idea that landscapes are ideological and can be manipulated by the powerful groups in society. Indeed, this will provide a conceptual frame within which my empirical material can be discussed.

Finally, the literature on planning is extensive and I draw only on two conceptual threads relevant to my work. The first is the planning ethos within which physical development takes place. In this context, I highlight the modernist and functionalist ethos which emphasises "efficiency" and "rationality". The second focuses on public participation and the issue of how people most affected by planning policies and actions should have a say in these matters. By drawing on the planning literature, I am paying due attention to the fact that the wider planning context plays an important role in influencing landscape development and place change, and I recognise that this planning context has a large role to play in deciding the future of

specific religious places within the urban fabric.

These theoretical orientations raise significant methodological problems. As an increasing number of geographers are beginning to realise, the study of human meanings and values require "something more subtle than the tools and techniques of the 'quantitative revolution'" (Eyles and Smith, 1988:xi). While quantitative methods provide extensive, broad-based and often descriptive data at an aggregate level (Sayer, 1984:222), it is to qualitative methods that one would turn for in-depth analyses that capture the beliefs, values and meanings of individuals in their everyday contexts. With increasing recognition of the value of qualitative methods in geography (Eyles and Smith, 1988; Burgess et al., 1988a, b & c) and other social sciences (Mitchell, 1983; Silverman, 1985; and Strauss, 1987), there is a danger that the two may be viewed as competing rather than complementary options. In the context of this study, my research objectives demand different levels and kinds of information, including broad-based aggregate data as well as in-depth personal detailed information. As a result, my eventual strategy involves four different methods, including a questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews with individual religious adherents, interviews with state representatives (planners, bureaucrats and politicians), and archival research.

1.4 Developing the thesis structure

This opening chapter has provided an overview of the thesis by defining my interests and the main driving forces behind my study. From there, my specific study objectives were framed and cast within the wider academic context of other research, both within and outside geography. The shortcomings of traditional geographical research on religion were highlighted, and the lack of a satisfactory theoretical basis

was pointed out. This led to a brief discussion of the four main conceptual anchors I have developed for my study, and their methodological implications. Chapter Two expands the issues introduced here by reviewing literature in geography and other disciplines which focus on religious places. The inadequacies of existing work will be discussed and the lacunae exposed. The four main conceptual anchors will then be discussed in greater detail, leading to a statement of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of my study.

In Chapters Three to Seven, I turn specifically to my case study of Singapore. Chapter Three provides a background to the country including a brief history of modern Singapore, an overview of the social structure and the religious setting, the political culture as well as urban development and land use planning. Chapter Four then sets out the field study in terms of both the theoretical arguments for the methods used and the practicalities of the research method. The different types of information required necessitate the use of a variety of methods in data collection and the options and eventual choice are discussed. Chapters Five to Seven report and analyse the results of the field study. Chapter Five focuses on the individual and how he/she interacts with public religious places. This will be analysed at two levels: the public and the private. Chapter Six shifts attention to the state and addresses state conceptions of religion and religious places. Chapter Seven then draws together the nexus between the secular state and religious individuals and groups, examining the ways in which the respective meanings and conceptions of religious places differ and how individuals and groups cope in these circumstances. The eighth and final chapter then provides a summary of the study and an evaluation of its contributions. It concludes the work by drawing out the wider implications in planning and policy making and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF RELIGION: TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE WAY FORWARD

2.1 Introduction

> In ancient and modern times alike, theology and geography have often been closely related studies because they meet at crucial points of human curiosity. If we seek after the nature of God, we must consider the nature of man (sic) and the earth, and if we look at the earth, questions of divine purpose in its creation and of the role of mankind on it inevitably arise (Glacken, 1967:35).

The union of geography and religion has indeed spawned a considerable body of research. In this chapter, I aim to cast a critical eye over existing geographical works on religion as well as discuss relevant research by non-geographers. I will also develop the conceptual underpinnings of my study. Specifically, the chapter will be divided into the following sections. In section 2.2, I trace the historical development of the relationship between geography and religion from the times of the ancient Greeks to the present. In particular, I identify the over-riding theme that binds the bulk of geographical research on religion over the last three decades as the impact of religion on the environment, and trace it to the influence of "traditional" cultural geography of the Sauerian school. This paves the way for my critique of this body of research in section 2.3, cast within a review of "traditional" cultural geography. In section 2.4, I turn my attention to contemporary developments in the geographical study of religion by identifying some recent trends: the attention given to reciprocal relationships between religion and environment; the discovery of a social geographical orientation which focuses on religious communities; the recognition of worldwide trends of secularisation; the study of the political symbolism of religious places; and the espousal of a Christian viewpoint in geographical research. Picking up on some

of these trends in section 2.5, I explore possible ways forward, particularly with the aim of developing a conceptual framework for my own study. Finally, section 2.6 will summarise the major arguments in this chapter.

2.2 The geographical study of religion: Historical development

Some writers have pointed out that geography's links with religion go back to the times of the ancient Greeks. Then, it was believed that the world was the manifestation of a religious principle, namely the inviolability of spatial order. Geographers were therefore often engaged in producing mathematically precise cosmological models, world diagrams and maps that reflected this spatial order (Isaac, 1965:2-5; Gay, 1971:1). Whether this constituted a "geography of religion" has been disputed however. Isaac (1965), for example, has argued that it belongs instead to the realm of "religious geography"[1] while Stump (1986) has classified it under geosophy.[2]

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, what Isaac (1965:10) termed "ecclesiastical geography" was the order of the day and it involved primarily the mapping of the spatial advance of Christianity in the world. Such work was propelled by the desire to disseminate Christianity and gained much impetus from the support of Christian Churches. This mapping of the spread of religions (or territorial

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[1] To Isaac (1965:1), "religious geography" is not part of the "modern western geographer's metier"; it accepts religion as "basic" and "the land is thought or made to conform to it". Conversely, the geography of religion concerns the "impact of religion upon the landscape or the land upon religion". Despite Isaac's distinction, throughout this thesis, "geography or religion" and "religious geography" will be used synonymously.

[2] "Geosophy" is a neologism coined by J.K. Wright (1947) to refer to the study of geographical knowledge, that is, the nature and expression of geographical ideas held by people past and present.

demise, as the case may be) is still a part of contemporary study (Crowley, 1978; Landing, 1982; and Heatwole, 1986), differing only in that progressively more sophisticated methods of mapping different religions are being employed (Isaac, 1965:11). Some of the most definitive studies in this respect have been documented by Gay (1971:4-15). Alongside ecclesiastical geography, "biblical geography", or the "historical geography of biblical times" (Isaac, 1965:8), also gained ascendency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It involved attempts to identify places and names in the Bible and to determine their locations, again illustrating the powerful influence of the Christian Churches. This approach, too, remains today and is upheld by the Association of American Geographers' Bible Geography Specialty Group, which deals with the geography of the Christian Bible.

In the late seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, another link between religion and geography emerged in physico-theological arguments about the earth. Nature was seen as a divinely-created order; the earth and its geography, it was argued, was too advantageous to life and too well-reasoned to be accepted as fortuitous circumstances. It was therefore thought that divine creation stood alone as a plausible explanation for the earth's form (Glacken, 1956, 1967; Buttner, 1980:94-5). Alongside this physico-theological school, another body of thought was also developing in the eighteenth century under the influence of Montesquieu and Voltaire. This was the environmentally deterministic school which sought to explain the essential nature of various religions in terms of their geographical environments. This school continued into the twentieth century, with key figures like Semple (1911) and Huntington (1945) arguing that the imagery and symbolism of a religion as well as objects of worship were frequently determined by geographical factors (see also Hultkrantz, 1966).

As opposed to this deterministic trend, an interest in religion's influence on the environment, including the influence on the physical landscape as well as on social and economic patterns, emerged in the 1920s. This heralded the beginning of a large body of work which examined the role of religion in landscape change, a possibilist outlook in contrast to the earlier deterministic stand. This orientation has continued today in works that also reflect traditional cultural geographical concerns. Specifically, these writings cover a wide gamut of empirical themes such as the spatial distributions of religious groups (Shortridge, 1978; Stump, 1981; and Heatwole, 1985); the character of religio-culture regions (Meinig, 1965; Landing, 1969, 1972; Francaviglia, 1970, 1979; Rechlin, 1976; Jackson, 1977, 1978); the distributions and characteristics of cemeteries (Darden, 1972; Martin, 1978; and Nakagawa, 1989) and sacred structures (Curtis, 1980; Biswas, 1984; and Laatsch and Calkins, 1986); and pilgrim flows (King, 1972; Bhardwaj, 1973, 1985; Tanaka, 1977; Shair, 1981a & b; Rinschede, 1986). In addition, some studies also deal with the influence of religion on social and economic patterns, such as the differential unemployment between religious groups (Osborne and Cormack, 1986); the religious motivation for mining activities (Seavoy, 1983); and the relationship between religion and demographic trends, specifically, fertility, mortality and migration rates (Rele and Kanithar, 1977; Sabagh and Lopez, 1980; Kan and Kim, 1981; and Scheffel, 1983).

Finally, in a context of increasing concern with environmental degradation, a major strand of research emerged in the 1960s which has been variously termed "religious ecology", "environmental ethics" and "environmental theology". Within this rubric, research has progressed in two main areas: the first has sometimes been labelled the "Lynn White debate"; the second, somewhat overshadowed by the former, has focused on the impact of religious thought on plant and animal ecology.

Lynn White's (1967) "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis" sparked a debate about the causes of increasing environmental degradation on planet earth. White argued that degradation was the result of Christian thought in which God gave humans dominion over the earth. To prevent further damage to the environment, White posited two options for humankind. One was to improve Christianity by adopting the view of St Francis of Assisi, widely regarded as the patron saint of ecology; the other was to abandon Christianity altogether and replace it with a non-western religion, such as Zen Buddhism. White's work drew comments from a great variety of scholars including geographers, historians, scientists, theologians, philosophers and ecologists. Some accepted the proposition that Christianity was to blame but argued that non-western religions have not, in practice, been more successful in preventing environmental crises. The recommendation was that Christianity be improved by emphasising biblical passages more compatible with modern ecological and environmental attitudes (Cobb, 1972). Toynbee (1972) agreed insofar as he attributed environmental crises to monotheistic religions: his remedy was to revert to pantheism and the religions of the east. Others such as Passmore (1974) rejected not only western religion but eastern religion as well.

On the other hand, others spoke in defence of Christianity. For example, Glacken (1967) and Dubos (1969, 1972) argued that contrary to White's reading, biblical passages have shown concern for nature. Doughty (1981) pointed out the obvious, yet little regarded fact that western Christian thought is simply too rich and complex to be characterised as hostile towards nature. Furthermore, Doughty argued, holding a particular attitude does not amount to acting in a manner consistent with that attitude. On the other hand, Kay's (1989) recent contribution to the debate opened up a different dimension: he suggested that God confers human dominion over nature to righteous and faithful people but punishes transgressors with natural

disasters. Kay's argument is based on a reading of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), but has been criticised, amongst other things, for its attempt to elicit a single biblical environmental model (Rowley, 1990).

The "Lynn White debate" has come a long way since White's paper was first published, as Hargrove (1986) showed in a paper which synthesised and analysed the major trends that have emerged. In particular, his assessment of current situations is pertinent. Hargrove (1986:xviii) argued that it would be useful and necessary to "get beyond worrying about the illusory threat to Western civilization posed by Eastern thought to the real threat to human civilisation as a whole posed by the environment crisis". It would indeed be sensible if the focus of debate shifted away from an obsession with blame and highlighted the practical exigencies of the situation instead.

Perhaps because of these variety of themes, Tuan (1976:271) and Sopher (1981:510) concluded that the field of religious geography is characterised by "disarray" and a "lack of coherence". As Sopher (1981:510) argued, "a decade and more of modest increase in the volume of geographic writing on religions and religious institutions has not brought consensus on the nature of the pertinent field or even agreement whether there can be such a field at all." His analysis however seems unnecessarily pessimistic. If he was concerned with the apparent lack of a core binding existing research together, then, as I have argued, the seeming profusion and confusion of empirical themes actually belie a commonality of concern -- the impact of religion on the environment. If his concern was that no clear boundaries defined the sub-field and confusion reigns as to what constitutes "geography of religion", "religious geography", "ecclesiastical geography" and "biblical geography", then there is no reason to doubt the very existence of the field at all. Indeed, we should stop worrying about definitional problems and simply accept the geographical study of religion as an

aspect of cultural geography. In the next section, I will examine the problems with the bulk of existing geographical work on religion by casting it in the context of a discussion of the problems with "traditional" cultural geography.

2.3 Geography and religion: the influences of "traditional" cultural geography

For many years, research in cultural geography has remained in the shadow of Carl Sauer. This is clearly borne out in the extensive research on Sauer and his contributions to geography (see, for example, Leighly, 1976, 1987; and Kenzer, 1986, 1987 a & b). This section, however, will not be concerned as much with "Sauerology"[3] as with explicating some of the problems inherent in the "traditional" school of cultural geography which Sauer inspired and the manner in which these difficulties are reflected in much geographical work on religion.

While it would be unfair simply to condemn all past cultural geographical research as flawed, it would be equally unjustifiable to claim that recent re-assessments of cultural geography represent little more than old wine in new bottles.[4] Traditional cultural geography does suffer from a number of shortcomings: a problematic treatment of culture; an unnecessarily limited focus on rural, antiquarian settings; a narrow concern with physical artifacts; and the lack of attention to theory.

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[3] "Sauerology" is used as a convenient label to refer to "the unpacking of and critical reflection upon the intellectual history, context and influence of (Sauer)" (Rowntree, 1988:575).

[4] Rowntree (1988:582) stressed the "continuity and evolution of cultural geography" rather than the "'old-new' duality" which "tends to be a paradigm-trashing replacement strategy that reinforces and reifies one component at the expense of the other: it privileges the new over the old, usurps intellectual territory, and severs connections with the past." He is however also careful to suggest a "wait-and-see" attitude rather than dismiss recent discussions as "old wine in new bottles".

Many of these problems are often reflected in existing research on religion as the rest of this section will illustrate.

Possibly the greatest problem with "traditional" cultural geography is the unsatisfactory way in which "culture" is treated. As many writers readily acknowledge, the concept of "culture" is a problematic one (see, for example, Williams, 1976:87-93). I am concerned here with three important ways in which culture has been unsatisfactorily theorised in cultural geography: as superorganic, homogeneous and apolitical. In particular, I want to show how these problematic conceptualisations are also reflected in geographical studies of religion.

In an influential paper published in 1980, Duncan criticised Sauerian cultural geography because it fundamentally reifies culture as "superorganic", "an entity above man (sic), not reducible to the actions of individuals, mysteriously responding to laws of its own" (Duncan, 1980:181). Such a transcendental view of culture, derived from Berkeley anthropologists Alfred Kroeber[5] and Robert Lowie, lies at the root of much of the dissatisfaction with "traditional" cultural geography. Without repeating Duncan's critique at length, the superorganic concept of culture is unsatisfactory because it separates the individual from culture: while giving culture causal powers, it denies any role for the individual. Culture is the active agent; humans are passive, blank pages on which the culture pattern is imprinted (Duncan, 1980). Yet, as Geertz (1970:54) pointed out, there is no such thing as an individual apart from culture. By treating culture as external to individuals, and individuals as uniformly conditioned

[5] In an exchange between Solot (1986, 1987) and Kenzer (1987b), the idea that Sauer's conception of culture was derived from Alfred Kroeber was debated. Kenzer (1987b:471) argued that "(s)imply because Kroeber and Sauer were close colleagues at Berkeley does not justify the proposed intellectual connection between the two." Solot, on the other hand, took the widely-accepted stand that Kroeber was an influential force on Sauer.

by this reified culture, there is no consideration of the fact that individuals are different and that the influence and experience of individuals and social groups are important. This removes important questions such as those related to environmental experience and social interaction from the research agendas of "traditional" cultural geographers.

In the context of religious geography, a similar problem exists in the treatment of "religion" as separate from the individual. This has led to a neglect of how individuals practise their religions and how the experience of religions may be different for different people in different settings. Religion, like culture, is reified and external to humans. This is unacceptable since religions only gather meaning in relation to people. The result is that significant issues which recognise the importance of human beings and their experiences are ignored. For example, the experience and symbolic importance of religious places for individuals and groups have not been explored. Neither has the interaction between social groups (both between different religious groups and between religious and secular groups) been studied, particularly in the light of how such interaction affects religious landscapes.

The problem of "culturalism" also arises from the superorganic concept of culture. If culture is attributed causal status and human practices are explained by reference to culture, it begs the question of how culture itself is to be explained. In the context of religion, there is a similar treatment of "religion" as a given category and an unproblematic concept, with little attempt to understand it as comprising the beliefs and practices of individuals and groups, and how these may vary from locality to locality, and from time to time. This underlies the debate among some geographers as to whether the geographer should be knowledgeable about religionswissenschaft (Licate, 1967; Buttner, 1980; Sopher, 1981; Levine, 1986; and Kong, 1990). If religion is

treated simply as a given force to which certain landscapes can be attributed, then there would be little need to understand the "component parts" of religion for individuals and groups. If, on the other hand, "religion" is treated as more than just a superorganic entity, and the specific processes through which it affects landscapes are sought, then an understanding of the values, rules and codes of the relevant religions become important.

Two other closely related problems with the way culture is treated can be raised. One is the assumption that there is a homogeneous Culture rather than heterogeneous cultures. The other is the resultant failure to recognise that cultures have political dimensions. In reality, no one society is totally undifferentiated. Even in a society that is racially, linguistically, and religiously homogeneous (insofar as that is likely), there will exist different cultures such as those between gender groups. The problem is compounded in a heterogeneous society where a variety of racial, religious and linguistic traditions may intersect with different gender and class cultures. The assumption of a homogeneous Culture is thus extremely unsatisfactory. Yet, there has been little consideration of the heterogeneity of cultures or the nature of plural societies. Indeed geographers have paid little heed to the idea of "plurality" itself (see, however, Clarke, Ley and Peach, 1984 in which the ideas of Furnivall (1948) and Smith (1969) are explored.) At the same time, by assuming one homogeneous Culture to which all action can be attributed (a case of cultural determinism), "traditional" cultural geographers ignore the fact that there are other possible explanatory variables inherent in society. For example, the political interests of particular groups, the conflicts arising from opposing interests, the struggle for political power, government and other institutional policies, and the decisions of business organisations and financial institutions all have causal powers which the reification of culture ignores (Blaut, 1980; Duncan, 1980).

Most research in religious geography has also reflected a failure to address more than one religious group in one place at any one time. Countless studies have dealt with the influence of one religious group as if it existed in isolation in that society. For example, the tremendous interest in Mormon culture regions (Meinig, 1965; Francaviglia, 1970, 1979; and Lehr, 1972) and the landscapes of the Amish (Branson, 1967; Landing, 1969, 1972; and Rechlin, 1976) focus on these religious communities in isolation and fail to address the conflicts that arise as these groups increasingly come into contact with other culture groups. Similarly, in many other papers which deal descriptively with religious structures as distinctive imprints on the landscape (for example, Griffith, 1975; Biswas, 1984), the implicit assumption is that the particular religion in question will create a particular impact on the landscape, without any influence by other religious and/or secular forces. Hence, it would appear that religion has absolute power to create an impact on the landscape in any given situation. How different religious groups may have conflicting interests and how this may influence landscapes is seldom studied. Similarly, how a religious group and a secular body may be at variance over the "true" allocation of meanings for particular places is also seldom considered.

Aside from the inadequate treatment of "culture", traditional cultural geography has also tended to focus on rural, pre-industrial antiquarian settings. While this in itself is not undesirable, it does seem strange that for a long time, cultural geographers should veer away from urban settings and cultural change when these seem to be the over-riding reality in the world today. Researching log-cabins and barns is fine but predominantly researching antiquarian landscapes in an urban world of rapid cultural change would seem to be unnecessarily restrictive. Fortunately though, in religio-geographical research, work has been done on urban religious landscapes. For example, Dube (1968) has studied the Indian city of Varanasi as an

attractive centre of tourism and pilgrimage, paying particular attention to tourism as an economic and industrial base for the city. Studies have also been done of cemeteries as an element of urban land use (for example, Pattison, 1955; and Darden, 1972). However, there is clearly potential to consider more closely the ways in which different groups and their values are played out in the urban landscape. For instance, in urban areas where economic forces seem to predominate in effecting landscape changes, what room is there for other non-economic forces, such as religion? In urban settings where secularisation is argued to be strong (Ellul, 1970; Cox, 1965), what are the implications for the changing relationships between religious and non-religious groups, and with what effects on landscapes? On the other hand, in other urban contexts where technological advancement has brought about the "electronic church",[6] what then are the impacts on religious landscapes? Further, in urban areas where there has been a religious revivalism, "storefront churches" have come into being and competition for precious urban land has forced the innovative use of space. Such emerging phenomena in urban contexts have not been adequately studied.

A further problem in "traditional" cultural geography is the focus on material culture or physical artifacts (such as fences, log cabins or gravemarkers), while disregarding the symbolic qualities of landscape. Ideas and values are not really discussed unless they are directly expressed in landscapes. This has prevented a fuller understanding of the meanings that humans attach to places and how these meanings relate to other aspects of existence. Certainly, with few exceptions, the symbolic qualities of religious landscapes have not been well investigated. Most studies have concentrated on the characteristics, functions, locations, distributions, and

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[6] Television ministry has become particularly important in the United States of America. Tweedie (1978) has studied some of the religious groups involved; the types of religious programmes produced; the audience estimates for various denominations; and the age and sex profiles of viewing audiences.

origins of particular physical religious structures. For example, Laatsch and Calkins (1986) described the "ecclesiastical folk architecture" of Belgian roadside chapels in Wisconsin while others have described changes in the physical form (architecture and spatial arrangements), site characteristics, and location of religious buildings over time (for example, Biswas, 1984; and Sechrist, 1986). In these works, little attention is paid to the symbolic meanings of these structures.

Finally, "traditional" cultural geography has tended to proceed without a theoretical framework. This has its roots in Sauer's atheoretical approach and reflects his negative attitude towards theory, as opposed to his belief in the importance of "descriptive science". In a letter to Frank Aydelotte which Entrikin (1987:78) quoted, Sauer appeared to view favourably the work of the North Carolina sociologists for their field orientation rather than their theoretical rigour: "When those people get together they don't talk about epistemology or theory; they exchange observations, as a group of natural scientists would do." This lack of satisfactory theoretical underpinnings is also evident in religio-geographical research. Indeed, Levine's (1986) call for more theoretically-informed research represents a lone and late voice. Perhaps the attempts at more theory-informed research in the "new" cultural geography can shed some light on how religio-geographical research may proceed. This will be dealt with in section 2.5.3.

2.4 Looking ahead: Neglected perspectives and recent developments

Thus far, I have provided an overview of the historical relationship between geography and religion and identified the major thematic concerns of research to date. Following that, I discussed research over the last three decades which dealt with

religion's impact on the environment. In this section, I will highlight some neglected perspectives and recent developments in the field, citing pertinent empirical studies where possible. These have the potential of pushing the frontiers of research forwards. Some of these perspectives were raised sporadically by geographers in the past but did not attract the attention they merit. Others are more recent concerns. In general, five directions can be discerned.

First, while the determinist and possibilist approaches discussed in the preceding section are still adopted, the study of one-way relationships between religion and environment has been criticised -- the relationship is reciprocal (Fickeler, 1962; Sopher, 1967; Buttner, 1974, 1980; and Levine, 1986). In other words, in as much as religious beliefs and practices have an influence on the environment, so too does the environment influence the development of religious beliefs and practices. The call is for specific attention to be paid to such reciprocal relationships between religion and environment but sadly, this has rarely been carried through into empirical research.

Second, there has been a discovery of a social geographical orientation as opposed to the hitherto clearly cultural geographical slant. The focus, as Buttner (1980) has highlighted, is the religious group or community as the intermediary force between religion and the environment. Every relationship between religion and environment functions through the religious body, or religionskorper (Buttner, 1980:96). The community, its spatial structure, the activities it gives rise to, its mental attitudes, the associated occupational and social structures, leisure behaviour, process of change and so forth, then become the prime concern of research.

The third development had its beginnings in the 1960s when there was a process of worldwide secularisation. Buttner (1980:100, 104) called for the incorporation

of this widespread process of secularisation into the geographical study of religion to prevent it from becoming a "geography of relics", "restricted to the study of those ever-shrinking areas in which religion still has a formative effect on the environment." In this manner, geographers of religion may begin to study a "geography of spiritual attitudes" instead. However, Buttner did not suggest how, in practical terms, such a study could be done. Like Buttner, Isaac (1959-60:17) recognised that with increasing secularisation, religion's impact on the landscape would become minimal in comparison to the historic past when it played an important role in the patterning of the landscape. However, instead of calling for the study of this secularisation process, Isaac appeared content to study past landscapes and to see the geography of religion as an essentially "ethnological and historical study". The dynamism of a constantly changing religious scene is thus ignored. Both authors were unable to foresee the growth of religious extremism in recent years, for example, in Iran, and the revival of religion in communist U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. These countries offer the student of religion unique case studies which run counter to worldwide trends of secularisation.

While Buttner and Isaac did not examine empirically the effects of the increasing secularisation they identified, a few studies have examined the symbolic meanings of churches in changing cultural and social situations. Two examples are Foster's (1981, 1983) papers dealing with rural churches in Minnesota and Manitoba. These churches had ceased to be used for regular worship services because of the declining rural church population. Since their religious role had ceased to be important, it was suggested they be used for secular purposes instead. This, however, sparked controversy, a fact which Foster (1983) attributed to the significance of rural churches as places of personal attachment for many families, as well as their role in local history.

An outgrowth of increasing secularisation in the world is the much greater potential for conflict between secular and religious interests in society. Few cultural geographers have focused on such discord, much less through an analysis of the role of religious buildings in these conflicts. One exceptional study is Shilhav's (1983) treatment of the question of (potential) conflict between religious and secular agents in the demands for land. Shilhav studied the symbolic and functional locational requirements in the siting of synagogues, discussing how the balance between the two may be upset. He cited examples primarily of Israeli towns, past and present, to show how practical locational requirements may at times become a more significant factor in siting a synagogue than symbolic ones. In so doing, he opened the way for comparative studies between societies with different spiritual and ideological traditions.

A fourth direction that has become increasingly important is the study of the political symbolism of religious places, particularly in terms of how religious places reflect, reinforce or challenge power structures and political legitimacy. This research trend reflects recognition of the importance of symbolic as opposed to purely functional meanings of places. Certainly, within cultural geography, this is part of a larger re-orientation in which much more attention is given to the importance of symbolism in landscapes, as opposed to "traditional" cultural geographical concerns with the description, distribution and diffusion of material artifacts. The new studies, as Cosgrove argued (1986:3), disclose "the meanings that human groups attach to areas and places and the ways in which these are expressed geographically." Studies which explore the political meanings invested symbolically in religious landscapes include, for example, Lewandowski's (1984) work on Madras, Duncan's (1985, 1990) work on Kandy, Harvey's (1979) study of the Sacre Couer in Paris and Rawding's (1990) analysis of churches in nineteenth century rural England.

Lewandowski (1984), in her paper on Madras, illustrated admirably how the state attained political ends through cultural and religious symbolism. Specifically, she showed how through Hinduism and its symbols, the state created a functioning urban landscape while contributing to its own political legitimation. For example, the earlier colonial influence was replaced by representing folk and religious heroes in the renaming of places and the erection of statues in the city. The use of religious landscapes for political legitimation has also been discussed by Duncan (1985, 1990) in the context of Sri Lanka. In his 1985 paper, Duncan showed how the contemporary Sri Lankan president modeled his actions upon those of the kings of Kandy and so presented himself as an "ideal Buddhist ruler". He spent much of his time visiting Buddhist temples. His first act after his election was to go to the Temple in Kandy to worship the relic of the Buddha and he addressed the nation from the Octagon of the Temple in Kandy where Kandyan kings used to address the people. These "civic rituals" were largely dependent upon the landscape for their effect because their significance derived from the location of the rituals. In a more recent study focusing on early nineteenth century Kandy, Duncan (1990) showed how the kings' political fortunes were tied to the environment. He illustrated how kings transformed a set of religious texts into the medium of the built environment and how this built environment then either helped or hindered to foster political legitimacy. Religious landscapes thus did much more than reflect a people's religious world view, they were also heavily invested with political symbolism. Duncan's contribution is particularly significant because he gave due attention to contestatory readings of the same landscape. He analysed the king's reading of the landscape as well as those of the nobles and the peasants. However, his analysis of the symbolic content of Kandyan landscapes is sometimes burdened by his concern with drawing linguistic analogies: the identification of tropes in the form of synecdoches, metonyms, similies, allegories and so forth. In fact, it seems possible to achieve the goal of

uncovering ideological content without adopting such a semiological superstructure. I will return more fully to this issue in section 2.5.3 when I explore the possibilities of using semiotics as part of the theoretical structure of my work.

Another example of contestatory political readings of religious landscapes is Harvey's (1979) paper on "Monument and myth". Focusing on the Basilica of the Sacre Couer in Paris, Harvey illustrated how its construction was not simply an act of religious devotion: it was shrouded in political controversy. The movement to build the Basilica drew much support from ultra-conservative Catholics and from those espousing the cause of monarchist restoration because it was perceived as a public act of contrition for the wars and destruction of Paris. It was also seen as a symbol of the return to law and order which was for them embodied in the monarchy. On the other hand, the republican population of Paris tried unsuccessfully to stop its construction because they saw it as a manifestation of reactionary monarchism. Because of these contrary readings, the Basilica was termed "an incessant provocation to civil war" by the city council (Harvey, 1979:379).

Rawding's (1990) study of the churches in the Wolds of North Lincolnshire illustrated the way in which power structures are reinforced by landscapes. Specifically, he discussed how the iconography of parish churches reflected and reinforced the landownership patterns and rural power structures. His argument was that landlords and wealthy tenant farmers created landscapes which mirrored their prevailing tastes, drawing evidence from an examination of four main groups of artifacts common to churches: memorial windows, monuments within the church, gravestones or tombs within the church and tombs in the churchyard. The social and political relations were made both "venerable and unquestionable" because they were inscribed and naturalised in the religious environment.

The final point of convergence between geography and religion differs from the four described above in that it involves an explicit attempt to present a Christian viewpoint on geographical issues and "to identify the nature of the Christian geographer's vocation" (Swan, 1990:6). Ley's (1974) work on the "evils" of cities springs immediately to mind. He argued that "inner city despair", with all its related problems of disease, crime, poverty, social malaise and alienation was not primarily the result of "some imperfect infrastructure" that has become institutionalised but was more directly the result of the evil in humans. As he put it,

> Evil is personal, an ingredient of man's (sic) nature, hence its tenacity, hence the flimsiness of social science models of man and the failure of plans based on such models. A fuller, more humane view of man is required, one which acknowledges both his dignity and his depravity. Such a perspective is presented by the Christian view of man (Ley, 1974:71).

To Ley, the natural solution to our many problems therefore does not rest in "new structures" alone: "the revolution must be spiritual as well as institutional" (Ley, 1974:71).

Since Ley's contribution, a group of professional geographers from various tertiary institutions and countries have met at St Catherine's College, Cambridge, to form a Fellowship of Christian Geographers. Olliver's (1989:106) report of the meeting asserted that "Christians, like Marxists, humanists and positivists, have a 'basis of faith' which shapes their philosophic perspective on life and geography, and hence the way they actually live their lives and do their geography." The group has since organised meetings and circulated newsletters, espousing a "Christian" approach to geographical research. What this Christian perspective is, however, has not been fully explored. An ongoing study by Cooper (in preparation) is one of the few examples of beginning steps in this direction. Arising from his personal Christian commitment,

Cooper is examining people's attitudes concerning the reciprocity between personal Christian commitment and their relationships with specific landscapes and places.

To summarise, this section has illustrated the various directions and perspectives that geographers writing about religion have taken, apart from the traditional approaches which have dealt primarily with religion's impact on the environment. While some of these are recent developments, others represent a shift only insofar as they now attract greater debate and discussion on both sides of the Atlantic than they did before. As the field develops, there are clear signs of a much more "open" attitude towards multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological work, and a greater willingness to integrate the religious with the wider political, economic and social context. This contrasts with Isaac's (1961-62:12) earlier view that the task of a geography of religion is to "separate the specifically religious from the social, economic and ethnic matrix in which it is embedded, and to determine its relative weight in relation to other forces in transforming the landscape."

2.5 Charting the way forward

Taking into consideration some of the problems with existing literature discussed in section 2.3 as well as some recent perspectives discussed in section 2.4, I will now explore ways forward in religio-geographical research which may help me construct a conceptual framework for my empirical study. Bearing in mind my three aims outlined in Chapter One (pp 19-20), the conceptual underpinnings of my work can be discussed under four separate but related themes. The first has to do with human environmental experiences, that is, how people experience, value and are attached to their environments. The second focuses on notions of sacredness, sacred

places and religious experiences. Together, they provide some of the conceptual tools for my analysis of symbolic meanings and values which people invest in their religious buildings. The third theme deals with cultural politics and ideological landscapes, while the fourth focuses on questions of planning and the production and "annihilation" (Porteous, 1988) of place. These themes will, in turn, frame my discussion of the state and its relationship with religious places in Singapore. In the following discussion, I will draw on a variety of sources, including humanistic geography, the "new" cultural geography, sociology, political studies and "religious" studies (the history of religions and the comparative study of religions).

2.5.1 Human environmental experiences

One of the chief criticisms of traditional cultural geography as section 2.3 shows, is the lack of consideration of individual persons. As a consequence, people's environmental experiences, both at the group and individual levels, have been neglected. In this section, I will examine some research mainly by humanistic geographers which redress this neglect. Some of their concepts are useful for my later discussions of the place attachments people form with their religious buildings.

Chief among the contributions of humanistic geography is its reinstatement of human beings at the centre of geographical inquiry. This contrasts with the focus on the logical relations between things in an abstracted space which characterised positivist human geography. The perspective also contrasts with the way traditional cultural geographers treat human beings as passive agents acting under the influence of a reified "culture". Specifically, humanistic geographers have attempted to understand the meanings, values and human significance of life events (Buttimer, 1976). Ley and Samuels (1978:2) further elaborated on the central and active role

accorded to human awareness, agency and creativity in humanistic geography, arguing that it represents "a more self-conscious, philosophically-sound and active understanding of the richness of human existence beyond the self-limiting strictures of analytical methods and positive science."

Research in this tradition has focused chiefly on understanding the nature of environmental experiences and the need to appreciate such experiences from the viewpoint of the subject. Humanistic geographers have been particularly interested in human attachment to and love for place; what constitutes a sense of place; and why some environments are valued above others (see, for example, Tuan, 1974a & b & 1977; and Gold and Burgess, 1982). These foci provide the broad frameworks within which specific questions to do with religious places can be cast. For example, a humanistic geographer interested in religious places could begin to explore the importance of religious places in people's lives, their attachments to these places and how and why they are valued. My concern with the meanings and values that religious places hold for "ordinary" lay-persons is a research question of this type and may thus benefit from the philosophies, concepts and methods of humanistic geography. The next few pages will therefore be given over to a fuller examination of some of the concepts used by humanistic geographers which are of particular value to my empirical research. These include the concepts of "insideness/outsideness", "topophilia", "sense of place", "genius loci", and "existential space".

Relph's (1976) insider-outsider division is presented as a basic dualism in the ways in which humans experience place. This distinction is succinctly described in the extract below:

> To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place ... from the outside you look upon a place as a traveller might

> look upon a town from a distance; from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it. The inside-outside division thus presents itself as a simple but basic dualism, one that is fundamental in our experiences of lived-space and one that provides the essence of place (Relph, 1976:49).

Relph identified four levels of insideness and three of outsideness. Vicarious insideness is experience of a place through secondary sources such as novels and films, which can nonetheless involve some depth involvement. Behavioural insideness in turn involves being in a place and seeing it as a set of objects, views and activities. Empathetic insideness is similar to behavioural insideness except that the qualities of appearance are less important than knowing, feeling and respecting a place. Finally, existential insideness is the "most fundamental form of insideness" (Relph, 1976:55) where places are significant without people consciously thinking about it. This is what Tuan (1980) recognised as the unreflexive consciousness of a place, and is the experience most people have at home.

On the other hand, existential outsideness involves a self-conscious and reflective uninvolvement with people and place. Places are not viewed as meaningful centres of existence but, at best, as backgrounds to activities. At another level, objective outsideness involves a deliberate analysis of places in terms of logic, models, reason and efficiency. This is evident in spatial analysis and in some planning quarters where the premium is on intellectual posture rather than emotional involvement with people and place. Finally, incidental outsideness occurs when places serve only as background to routine activities or trips.

Although Relph describes the insider-outsider dichotomy as a "basic dualism", his discussion of the various levels of insideness and outsideness suggests that human experiences with places actually fall somewhere along a continuum between two

polarities. Nevertheless, the fundamental distinction is useful as a conceptual tool to distinguish how different groups of people experience environments. For example, these concepts can frame an understanding of how religious adherents may experience their respective churches, temples and mosques as insiders, and how planners and policy-makers working from a functionalist framework are probably much closer to treating the lived environment as outsiders.

To understand how individuals experience environments as insiders, geographers have developed concepts such as "topophilia" and "sense of place". Tuan's (1974a:93) concept of "topophilia" is defined as the "human being's affective ties with the material environment". The nature of these ties varies enormously in intensity and mode of expression, for they can be emotional, nostalgic, aesthetic, tactile and/or visual. For example, topophilia may be experienced in the pleasure one gets from a view; the delight in the feel of air, water and earth; and it could be the feelings one has towards home, "the locus of memories" (Tuan, 1974a:93). Closely associated with this notion of "topophilia" is the concept of "sense of place". Eyles' (1985) use of the concept is wide-ranging, and includes some of the affective ties described above. For example, Eyles suggested that there is a nostalgic sense of place, in which feelings about a place are shaped by particular events that occurred in the past in that place. There is also the social sense of place, where place is the centre of social ties and interaction.[7] Tuan's (1974b) use of the concept, on the other hand, involves the application of moral and aesthetic judgements to sites and locations. The application of such judgements usually leads to a distinction between two types of places: public symbols and fields of care. Public symbols are places that yield meaning to the eye.

[7] In fact, Eyles (1985:122-26) identified ten dominant senses of place, but I highlight only the two most pertinent in my context: nostalgic and social senses of place.

They are distinctive and memorable, giving prominence to localities. Tuan (1974b:240) cited Stonehenge and Ayer's Rock as examples. Fields of care, on the other hand, are places possessing a particular personal or shared meaning for people. These meanings could develop out of a variety of conditions. Places could become centres of meaning because of repeated experience, for example. Religion can also create fields of care since religion is one way through which places can be invested with sacred meaning. As Tuan (1974b:242) commented, "a mysterious continuity exists between the soil and the gods: to break it would be an act of impiety." However, he concluded that with the decline of religions, there is a progressive decline in the sense of place.

Not all shades of meanings attributed to these concepts will necessarily be directly relevant to my subsequent empirical material but their core elements are significant. In particular, they will underpin my discussions of how religious adherents may develop affective ties with their churches, temples or mosques.

While topophilia and sense of place are concepts which focus on the nature of environmental experience, the notions of "existential space" and "genius loci" help us to think conceptually about the places which can be or are experienced from the perspective of insiders. "Existential space" is defined by individual experience, values and meanings. As Matore (1966:6) argued, space is not only apprehended through our senses, it is "experienced" -- "we project into it our personality. We are bound to it by affective ties." The resultant "existential geography" is thus concerned with how existential (lived-in) places become significant and attributed with meaning (Samuels, 1978, 1979). This notion of existential space[8] is thus a useful way of conceptualising

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[8] Tuan (1977:6) actually distinguished between the concepts of "space" and "place". The former is more abstract, undifferentiated, open and free while the latter is associated with security and stability. Place is also specific because it is what we are

religious places.

Similarly, the concept of "genius loci" focuses on the places of human environmental experiences. The concept is based on an ancient Roman belief that every being has its "genius", its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life not only to people but to places as well. As such, places have a particular identity or an "environmental character" which is the "essence of place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980:1). Places cannot, therefore, be dealt with simply from a functional perspective which focuses on spatial distribution and understands places only as analytic, scientific concepts. When so treated, the "everyday life-world" which "ought to be the real concern of man (sic) in general and planners and architects in particular" is lost (Norberg-Schulz, 1980:2). Recognising the genius loci of places would be one step towards more sensitive planning.

To sum up, humanistic geography and its concern with environmental experiences, raises questions that are related to my interests in the meanings and values of religious places. Just as humanistic geographers have been interested in human attachment to place and the meanings of place, I am concerned here with how religious places are experienced and how they are valued. The concepts I have discussed have not been used explicitly in relation to religious places. Certainly, little detailed empirical work has been done with these conceptual bases, and while writers like Tuan (1974a & b) may have recognised the potential, they have not explored empirically in any detail how these ideas work in everyday life.

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attached to. If this distinction is acknowledged, the concept of "existential space" may more appropriately be termed "existential place". However, I have chosen to retain Matore's original terminology here.

2.5.2 Sacredness, sacred places and religious experiences

The contributions considered in the preceding section dealt with human-environment relationships which could involve religious places but were applicable in other "secular" environments. In this section, I will focus specifically on religious places by discussing two main themes: the nature of religious experiences; and the investment of religious meanings in places.

The nature of religious experiences has been discussed within the comparative study of religions and the history of religions. Two major works in this respect are Otto's (1917) The Idea of the Holy and James' (1902) The Varieties of Religious Experience. Otto introduced the term "numinous" to mean the experience when a person makes contact with the sacred or sacred power. The numinous is non-rational: it cannot be handed down but can only be induced, incited and aroused.[9] Numinosity involves two feelings. In the presence of sacred power, one feels fragile and transient. This is "creature feeling". At the same time, there is also an awareness of mysterium tremendum. With mysterium, there is fascination, and at the same time, also the acknowledgement that there is this "Wholly Other" who attracts and repels simultaneously. Tremendum is at the same time a fear of God; a sense of majestas (overpoweringness and regal authority); and an urgency, a sense of the "energy" of the numinous object. Like Otto, James (1902) analysed the nature of religious experience and concluded that it is no one specific thing. Instead, religious sentiment is a "collective name for the many sentiments which religious objects may arouse in alternation" (James, 1902:27), such as fear, a feeling of dependence, a feeling of the infinite and so on. Significantly, James argued inter alia that there is nothing

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[9] The rational, on the other hand, can be taught, that is, handed down in concepts and passed on in school instruction (Otto, 1917:60).

particularly different between religious sentiment and any other type of sentiment. Hence,

> ... religious love is only man's natural emotion of love directed to a religious object; religious fear is only the ordinary fear of commerce, so to speak, the common quaking of the human breast, in so far as the notion of divine retribution may arouse it; religious awe is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations; and similarly of all the various sentiments which may be called into play in the lives of religious persons (James, 1902:27).

These attempts to capture and understand religious or sacred experiences will become significant in later chapters where the experiences of religious places are discussed.

A second major theme to consider here is the investment of religious meanings in places. Research has been multi-disciplinary, and has proceeded primarily along three thematic lines. The first is the examination of macro and microcosmic parallelism which involves the symbolic religious meanings invested in cities, kingdoms, palaces and temples, particularly in their physical layout. The second is the exploration of the symbolism of religious buildings, architecture and objects. The third is the analysis of how places and objects become imbued with religious meanings, that is, the process of sanctification.

The first theme of macro and microcosmic parallels has been widely explored, particularly in terms of how cities (the world of humans) are patterned after the macrocosmos (the domain of gods). Geographers (Wheatley, 1971; Tuan, 1977); scholars of religion (Eliade, 1949, 1957 and 1985); anthropologists (Geertz, 1980); historians (Heine-Geldern, 1942); architects (Jumsai, 1975; Hla, 1978); and urban designers (Miles, 1972) have all studied the ways in which particular cities have been constructed in the image of the universe as defined in a particular world view. This

parallelism is important if harmony is to be attained with universal forces. To cite one example, Tuan (1977), in Space and Place : The Perspective of Experience, dealt with various kinds of symbolic space, of which mythical space is one. He discussed the traditional Chinese world view where the human being occupies the centre of space and the ends of the earth correspond to the four cardinal points, each of which is associated with a colour, an animal, an element and one of the four seasons of the year. Such a world view had profound spatial implications, for Chinese towns such as Chang'an and Beijing were built on this macrocosmic model of the world. Furthermore, as Eliade (1957) pointed out, not only was such space viewed as a paradigmatic model of the macrocosmos but the process of creation was also seen to be a ritual repetition of the creation of the universe.

The study of the meanings of religious symbols has been pursued primarily by scholars of religion such as Tillich (1966), Dillistone (1966) and Hutt (1985) who have provided various taxonomies of symbols. For example, Hutt (1985:11-14) distinguished between representational and analogical religious symbols. The presence of a cathedral rising out of its environment and reaching upwards is symbolic of human relationship to God. This is an example of an analogical religious symbol. The three steps between nave and chancel are symbolic of the three persons of the Trinity, and the support of a cathedral by twelve pillars is symbolic of the twelve Apostles and their place in the life of the Church. These are representational religious symbols. In addition, a significant body of literature exists which seeks to explicate the meanings of religious symbols, often in the form of architectural features of churches, temples and mosques (see, for example, Michell, 1977; and Lip, 1978, 1981).

Many have studied the symbolic content of religious buildings and objects but surprisingly perhaps, the process of sanctification or "sacredization" (Sahoo, 1982) has

received far less attention. One major exception is Eliade (1957:26-27) who has identified three ways in which sacred places are formed: when there is a hierophany (an "act of manifestation of the sacred" such as a voice proclaiming the sacrality of a place); an unsolicited sign indicating the sacredness of a place (as when something that does not belong to this world manifests itself); or a provoked sign (for instance, using animals to help show what place or orientation to choose in setting up a village). In turn, Sahoo (1982), in a study of Puri (an eminent Hindu pilgrim town in India), discussed the processes through which some objects can become invested with sacred meaning through association and proximity with sacred objects.

The significant contribution made by research discussed in this section is recognition that in addition to "secular" attachments people form with places, particular places become important symbolically because of religious connections. However, existing research has not paid any attention to the possible differences in the ways in which meanings are invested and read by different groups of people. For instance, by focusing on macro and microcosmic parallels in city forms, many authors fail to consider if there may have been alternative religious traditions and correspondingly different macrocosmic views of the world within the respective societies. As a consequence, they also fail to consider the power relations which dictated that one particular world view (and hence its related urban form) should prevail. I will focus on this theme in the next section where I deal with notions of cultural politics, ideology and the role of landscapes.

2.5.3 Cultural politics and ideological landscapes

The research discussed so far focuses on human individuality and subjectivity but may be criticised for not treating adequately the social, economic and political

structures which influence human behaviour. Ley (1981:252) recognised and acknowledged this shortcoming in humanistic geography:

> In retrieving man (sic) from virtual oblivion in positivist science, humanists have tended to celebrate the restoration perhaps too much. As a result values, meanings, consciousness, creativity, and reflection may well have been overstated, while context, constraint, and social stratification have been underdeveloped ... there is the danger that humanistic work errs towards voluntarism and idealism.

Critics of humanistic geography have demanded a closer attention to the contextual structures which affect existence and experience. This has led to debates about the role of social structure and human agency. Without rehearsing the debate here (see Giddens, 1979; Brown, 1981; Gregory, 1981; Duncan and Ley, 1982; and Storper, 1985, for example), I agree there is need for care when emphasising individual experience and recognise that structural factors are important but I would caution against either extremes. As Ley and Samuels (1978:12) put it,

> Man (sic) and environment engage each other dialectically, there is no room in a humanist perspective for a passive concept of man dutifully acquiescing to an overbearing environment. But neither is man fully free, for he inherits given structural conditions and, indeed, may be unaware of the full extent of his bondage. There is ... need for a carefully balanced treatment of both consciousness and environment, an avoidance of both an excessive idealism and also an equally excessive materialism.

This balance between recognising the importance of human freedom of will and action on the one hand, and socio-political constraints on the other, is central to my argument that the meanings and values which individuals and groups invest in religious places are not context-free. These meanings are formed and continually adjusted within the existing socio-political milieu.

Singapore is my case study and that country's multi-cultural, multi-religious milieu and its secular state demands that attention must be paid not only to human

individuality and freedom of will and action but also to the wider socio-political context. Before discussing this Singaporean context in subsequent empirical chapters, it is necessary to elaborate the concept of "plurality of cultures" and the social interaction between different groups in society. This will be dealt with in the first part of this section. In the second part, I will consider how this recognition of plural groups within society leads to an analysis of power structures as reflected in landscapes. I will show how landscapes can be invested with differing symbolic meanings by different groups and will discuss some of the political implications of this process. The notions of cultural politics and ideological landscapes will be discussed. In the final part of the section, I will explore recent suggestions that semiotics offers the best way of analysing the ideological meanings of landscapes.

The combined perspectives of sociology and the "new" cultural geography are useful starting points for considering the plurality of cultural groups[10] within society. The perspective of "traditional" cultural geography which treats culture as homogeneous and consensual is being reconstructed as geographers recognise that all societies consist of a plurality of cultural groups and conflicting interests. These groups may encompass many interests -- black and white, urban and rural, male and female, gay and straight, popular and elite, religious and secular. Once this fact is recognised, it becomes evident that the interaction between groups is of crucial importance for cultural geography. Sociologists have argued for four main parameters in the forms of social interaction, namely total co-operation, total anomie, total conflict and total alienation (Simmie, 1974:10-12). In practice, any social interaction is unlikely to be

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[10] Although in the literature on the "new" cultural geography, the term "plurality of cultures" is often used in contrast to the "unitary homogeneous Culture" of "traditional" cultural geography, I prefer the term "plurality of cultural groups" to avoid any possible reification, that is, to emphasise that these are groups of people rather than reified forces which are accorded causal status.

purely of one type; it will more likely contain different degrees of all of them. For instance, instead of total co-operation and total conflict, there could be a constant process of negotiations between groups to accommodate the interests of each as far as possible. On the other hand, there may be subordination and domination with varying degrees of resistance from the subordinated groups. To better appreciate these power relationships, I will discuss the concepts of "ideology", "hegemony" and "ideological hegemony", in order to understand how one group seeks to exercise power over another.

"Ideology" is said to be "one of the most equivocal and elusive concepts" in the social sciences (Larrain, 1979:13) because the term has been adopted by different social theorists.[11] The most common distinction, however, is between those who impute a neutral meaning to ideology and those who take a critical Marxist perspective. In the former, "ideology" is taken to be a generalised system of ideas, or as Thompson (1981:147) put it, "a lattice of ideas which permeate the social order, constituting the collective consciousness of an epoch." In the latter, "ideology is a body of ideas and beliefs which creates a "false consciousness", a consciousness which "fails to grasp the real conditions of human existence" (Thompson, 1981:147). These ideas and beliefs serve to sustain dominance relations within society.

The concept of "hegemony" refers to "political rule" and "domination". It is therefore bound up with questions of power relations. In international affairs, analysis of hegemony is generally concerned with power relations between one state and

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[11] These include, for example, the Marxist approach and interpretations of it by Lukacs and Gramsci on the one hand (adopting a historicist approach), and Engels on the other (adopting a more positivist approach). Furthermore, there are the psychological interpretations of "ideology" by Pareto and Freud, the positivist foundations following the Baconian tradition by Durkheim, and the historicist tradition by Mannheim and Goldmann (see Larrain, 1979).

another and specifically, the domination of one over another. In Marxist thought, the concept is used to refer to the power relations between classes in society and has been taken up by writers in cultural studies (Hall et al., 1977; and Bennett, 1986) to interpret power relations between different cultural groups in society. "Hegemony" must be understood in terms of the means by which domination and rule is achieved: Gramsci (1973) was the first to distinguish between "dominio" ("rule") and "hegemony". "Rule" often takes the form of direct coercion. It is "visible" in that few who experience it fail to recognise it for what it is. On the other hand, "hegemony" does not involve controls which are clearly recognisable as constraints in the traditional coercive sense. Instead, hegemonic controls involve a set of ideas and values which the majority are persuaded to adopt as their own. So as to persuade the majority, these ideas and values are portrayed as "natural" and "common-sense". This is "ideological hegemony". Once accepted, the ruling group has the power to shape the political and social system. In specific terms, to stay in power, a ruling group must persuade people it is working for the general good of the country. Further, members of the ruling group must also persuade people to accept their definitions of the "general, public good" and people must be convinced that the ruling group's methods of attaining this "public good" are the most natural, common-sensical ones. If policies and actions are supported, the power of the ruling group is uncontested. The more successful ruling group is the one which attains power through ideological hegemony rather than coercion. When hegemonic control is successful, the social order endorsed by the political elite is, at the same time, the social order that the masses desire. However, while gaining and maintaining political power through hegemony is desirable, Gramsci (1973) also made clear that such hegemony is never fully achieved. In other words, those seeking to gain and/or maintain power will always be challenged in some way by other groups in society. Resistance may be overt and material but it could as well be latent and symbolic. In other words, while resistance

represents political action, it can often be conveyed in cultural terms, for example, through the appropriation and transformation of the material culture of the dominating group (see for example Hall and Jefferson, 1976; CCCS, 1982; and Hall et al., 1978).

In this sense then, there is a distinct cultural politics at work, a perspective long ignored in geography despite Blaut's (1980) call to recognise that cultures have political dimensions. An exception is Jackson's (1988) study of London's Notting Hill Carnival[12] which illustrated how resistance and protest can take cultural forms. Jackson argued that the Notting Hill Carnival was a contested social event whose political significance was inscribed in the landscape. Carnival is an "intensely spatial event" for both the police (for whom territorial strategies of containment are fundamental) and the participants (for whom the mobility of the streets is symbolic of freedom and protest against the established order). Jackson's study suggests parallel ways in which cultural geographers interested in religion can proceed. For example, religious processions, public ceremonies and festivals are important for religious groups to maintain their visibility and engage adherents in religious activity. Such events, with their attendant crowds, can become extremely sensitive and highly charged emotionally with the potential for conflict. These conflicts may be between different religious groups; they may also be between the police (and by extension, the state) and participants, as in the case of Notting Hill, where the control and management of the event can be symptomatic of wider structures of domination and resistance. There is thus much scope for the exploration of how processional routes are defined, locations of ceremonies controlled, activity times limited, and crowds contained, for

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[12] The Notting Hill Carnival in London has a history dating to 1966. While it started off local and on a small scale, polyethnic and essentially under white leadership, it became national in 1971, almost exclusively West Indian in leadership, in artistic conventions and in attendance (Cohen, 1982).

example.

Social and political relations of domination, negotiations, resistance and ideological hegemony are also very well expressed through landscapes. I will discuss this assertion by focusing on three themes: the role of powerful and dominant groups in the processes of place creation and definition; ideological landscapes, or the manipulation of the built environment and its meanings to legitimise the ideology of the dominant group; and the contestation of place meanings.

First, the built environment has often been said to reflect the ideas of an age but, as Schorske (1980) argued, some ideas of an age are never built. In fact, what is built reflects the powerful or dominant ideas of an age. In other words, the very process of creation of the built environment reflects a dominant social and political relationship. Knox (1982:293) argued that the "great bulk of the urban fabric symbolizes the impotence of the majority of its inhabitants" while Pahl (1975:151) suggested the built environment changes as the balance of power in a society changes. Places and landscapes are given meaning by different groups and often, power and dominance can give certain groups a disproportionately important role in defining place meanings. Anderson's (1987, 1988) research on Vancouver's Chinatown is a case in point. She argued that the place "Chinatown", like the racial category "Chinese", is not a "natural" category but one constructed within the white European cultural tradition. By granting legitimacy to these constructions, the municipal authorities in the late nineteenth century played the role of powerful agents in the definitional process. Anderson's study is fruitful ground in germinating research ideas in the context of religion. For instance, just as the municipal authorities in Vancouver held significant power to define place, in many countries today where religious buildings and sites are also tourist attractions, the question arises as to whether the religious

group has sole power to define the meaning of its building or site, or has such definitional power been appropriated by tourist promotion boards? Are there then sources of tension between these different groups who seek to re-present the religious places in particular ways? The notion that the place-definitional process is subject not only to the immediate community or individual but to the "power of others" (Eyles, 1988a) is discussed empirically in Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis.

A second theme is the ways in which certain groups may manipulate landscapes and landscape meanings to legitimise their own political ideology. This is the structural Marxist perspective which posits that symbolism in the built environment serves to legitimise the dominant ideology, power system and mode of production -- capitalism. Indeed, it is one of the means through which the necessary conditions for the continuation of the system are reproduced. Hence, with the rise of capitalism and especially with small scale capital losing ground to corporate and international capital, the built environment becomes dominated by corporate structures such as over-reaching office blocks (Knox, 1982). However, this particular interpretation of the symbolism of the built environment suffers from several shortcomings. For instance, the function of the state in relation to capitalism is not explored fully, nor are the consequences of conflict between different factions of capital considered. The role and degree of autonomy exercised by the urban design professions in shaping the built environment are not incorporated (Knox, 1982) and cultural trends are ignored (Zukin, 1988). In short, meaning and symbol in landscape are all too often subject to crude reductionism and explained solely in terms of class and power relations (Cosgrove, 1978, 1983, 1986), an approach which I would reject for all the above reasons.

On the other hand, I accept the basic argument that the built environment can

serve to legitimate the dominant ideology. As Duncan and Duncan (1988) pointed out, the dominant ideas and values of a society are encapsulated in concrete form in the landscape. Because the landscape is tangible, natural and familiar, it makes the ideas and values it symbolises seem natural and familiar. Beliefs and values become "naturalised" through the landscape:

> The concreteness of the landscape makes it seem more real, more unquestioned, more easily graspable both intellectually and emotionally precisely because it is a concrete object or place that can be visited, touched, venerated, or otherwise celebrated. It is for precisely this reason that statues, buildings, and places are used to symbolize belief systems (Duncan, 1985:182).

Similarly, Olwig (1984) pointed out that to identify particular values with landscape is to objectify those values. It is thus possible to preserve the values attached to landscapes by preserving those landscapes. This has significant implications. For example, the preservation of imposing colonial buildings in many Third World countries and the use of them by present-day local governments can be seen as a form of political legitimation.

A few studies by urban designers, political thinkers and geographers illustrate the potential for research which recognises the ideological use that can be made of symbolic landscapes. Boddy (1983), an urban designer and architectural critic, for example, argued that the cultural landscape and in particular the urban landscape can be manipulated for political ends by the ruling elites, reflecting their values which are all too often in conflict with the needs of the general populace. He suggested that there are four main political uses of urban design -- symbolic, obliterative, manipulative and egocentric. The symbolic use of urban design seeks to divert the attention of the population from the realm of problems through large public works, monuments and building programmes. The obliterative use involves clearing

problematic neighbourhoods by placing large public works through them. To manipulate elements of urban design would be to limit the choices and to stream the activities of the population while egocentricity would involve immense works that give shape to the psychic desires and weaknesses of a powerful ruler. Jakarta was cited as an instance where major urban monuments, public sculpture, ceremonial arteries and buildings were used for political ends during Sukarno's era.

The only political thinker I am aware of who has dealt at length with these issues is Lasswell (1979) whose book The Signature of Power: Buildings, Communication and Policy examined the symbolic use that can be made of our surroundings and specifically how environmental design can be an instrument of political power. He recognised, for example, the strategies of "awe", "fraternity", and "admiration". In the strategy of awe, the physical surroundings are constructed such that they fulfil the requirements of a system in which the decision process is in the hands of a few. The Kremlin walls in this respect are fully expressive of autocracy while the approach to the Forbidden City is a huge maze making concrete the aloofness associated with the control of power in the hands of a few. In the strategy of fraternity, the popular government lives with an insignificant physical barrier separating it from the populace. Lasswell cited the example of the White House which is neither remote nor exalted but rather has the approachability of a private home. The strategy of admiration in turn aims not to overwhelm with majestic displays of power but to attract by putting up a fine show. In these and other ways, Lasswell demonstrated the important symbolic political meanings of buildings, reinforcing my argument in this thesis that places are indeed laden with symbolic meanings beyond their functional roles. Similar arguments are evident in recent studies by geographers, including those I have discussed in section 2.4 above (Lewandowski, 1984; Duncan, 1985, 1990; Harvey, 1979; and Rawding, 1990).

In all these studies, it is apparent that the landscape is far from neutral. In the construction and demolition of material forms, and in the use of existing ones, buildings are vested with latent meanings beyond their manifest functions. Indeed, landscapes are ideological in that they can be made to reflect the views and serve the aims of a particular group. This theoretical standpoint will become significant in my empirical discussions, particularly in Chapter Six.

While recognising the ideologically hegemonic roles of landscapes, it is also true that resistance to such forms of domination can take the form of contestatory readings of the same landscapes. With this comes the need to distinguish between the intended meanings of specific groups or individuals and the meanings attributed to them by others (Knox, 1982). Duncan's (1990) study of the Kandyan kingdom in the early nineteenth century which I discussed in section 2.4 is commendable in recognising this point and is a significant and exceptional example of how it is possible to research contested meanings, even in a historical context. Similarly, Harvey's (1979) analysis of Sacre Couer is a fine example of such contested readings, since the intended symbolism of the building was a reaffirmation of monarchism but it was interpreted by many as a provocation to civil war.

Having examined conceptualisations of how landscapes reflect, reinforce or challenge social and political relationships, my final concern in this section is to examine suggestions that semiotics, another structuralist-inspired approach, can provide the necessary tools to study symbolic and ideological landscapes. Semiotics had a major influence on architecture and entered cultural geography via that route. The semiotician sees society as a system of signs and any object or action must be studied as part of this system (see Krampen, 1979; Foote, 1985; and Duncan, 1987 for reviews of the application of semiotics to architecture, geography and urban studies

respectively). The argument adopted is that landscapes may be seen as "texts" and that to understand the symbolic meanings of landscapes, the texts have to be decoded. The implicit assumption is that meanings have been encoded into the texts by producers. For example, the producer intending to communicate power may do so through majestic displays and spectacular and historic projects, while one intent on maintaining social harmony would be more likely to produce "modest" architecture (Knox, 1982). At the same time, Barthes (1967, quoted in Krampen, 1979:32) suggested that meanings are also produced by readers of the text so much so that the text is open to multiple "readings". This ties in significantly with the theme of contested readings of the same landscape.

Although all these arguments are credible, the end of uncovering the ideological content of landscapes can also be achieved without using imports from semiotics. For example, non-semioticians such as Williams (1973)[13] and Cosgrove (1985) have uncovered ideological underpinnings of everyday life without using linguistic analogies. Those advocating the use of semiotics often get caught up with identifying the landscape and buildings too literally as language and texts which result in attempts to establish the "grammar" of urban space, for instance. The linguistic analogy is taken so literally that there is a desire to match elements of the built environment with that of language -- for example, words, metonyms, synecdoches, syntax and so forth (see, for instance, Jencks, 1977; and Krampen, 1979:22-23). Such attempts can end up revealing little of the symbolic content of landscapes. For example, Duncan (1990) provided an interesting account of the symbolism of different parts of the Kandyan landscapes in the early nineteenth century (for instance, the lake,

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[13] Despite describing his own work as a kind of "social semiotics", Williams does not actually take on board the entire theoretical or methodological structures of semiotic analysis.

the shape of the city and the "wave swell wall" surrounding parts of the city), and did so adequately without reference to linguistic analogies. However, as soon as he began to identify elements of the landscapes as metonyms or synecdoches, he lost the sense of what these symbols actually stood for. As an example, when Duncan suggested that the lake in Kandy was a synecdoche for the Ocean of Milk in Hindu thought, the linguistic analogy revealed little of what the lake actually symbolised. It was only when he explored the symbolic meanings of the lake, without the linguistic baggage that the parallels became clear. Similarly unsatisfactory is the assumption of a finished and static product (landscape text) waiting to be interpreted (decoded) while, in reality, landscape meanings are not static but are modified as social values change. Eco (1986), for instance, argued that the meanings of built form are culturally and historically specific, that is, meanings change with culture and time. As a result, there may be instances when changing meanings come into conflict with unchanging built forms. Furthermore, there is also confusion of meanings invested in landscapes by producers with meanings of those landscapes to the users. In fact, semiotic analysis privileges the academic interpreter of landscapes. As Burgess (1990:140) pointed out, the analyst remains in the dominant and ironical position of telling readers what landscapes mean for those who use them. In fact, users are well able to discuss the meanings landscapes have for them, though few geographers have undertaken empirical research to understand these meanings (see, however, Harrison et al., 1986, 1987; and Burgess et al., 1988a, b & c).

With the reservations that attend the use of semiotic theory, perhaps what is more valuable is treating "landscape as text" as metaphor without taking the linguistic analogy too literally. The focus would then be less on the "synchronic analyses of signification systems" and more on "the actual symbolic content of ... space" (Duncan, 1987:480). In this light, Geertz's (1973) description of anthropology as cultural texts has

been used to advance the metaphor, for landscape as a text can then be read or interpreted as a social document, and the multiple layers of meanings can be uncovered through a process of "thick description". It is only at this level of metaphor that I am in any sense using imports from semiotics, and on this basis, I begin with the premise that religious places are invested with multiple layers of meanings which are to be uncovered. In Chapter Five, I will begin to uncover what some of these meanings are.

2.5.4 The production and annihilation of place: the role of planning

Bearing in mind that one of my original aims is to discover the role of the state in influencing religious places in Singapore, another part of the wider milieu which needs to be considered is the role of state planners in urban change. With this in mind, in this section I consider planning theory and practice. Rather than attempt to cover a huge literature, I will concentrate on two pertinent issues. The first focuses on planning principles in the modern movement with an emphasis on rationality and functionalism and what might be described as a "demolish and rebuild" mentality. The second deals with challenges to the modern movement in the form of calls for more sensitive place-making.

Modernism is clearly expressed in architectural circles in the works of Le Corbusier whose emphasis on functionalism and uniformity led him to propose one single building style for all nations and climates. Like him, Adolf Loos, a Viennese architect, advocated designs which were "objective", "functional" and "purely utilitarian"; in short, where "the meaning is the use" (cited in Ley, 1989:47). Such modernist notions are paralleled in some planning theories where the emphasis is on "functionalism" and "rationality". In Relph's (1976) discussion of the various categories

of insideness and outsideness, such attitudes would reflect an "objective outsideness", analysing places in terms of logic, models, reason and efficiency. The application of rationality in planning occurs at two levels. At a procedural level,[14] a clear example is Faludi's view of planning theory in which the "essence of planning" is "rationality", that is, the "application of reason in human affairs, so as to promote human growth" (Thomas, 1982:14). Faludi is concerned with the means of planning and not the ends; in other words, he is more concerned with the series of decision processes which seek to identify what best to do in given situations. In the 1950s, this rational procedural emphasis was reflected in the application of the "scientific approach" to public planning, derived from positivist and pragmatist doctrines. To this end, it was believed that decisions should be made "rationally in pursuance of agreed objectives, and in knowledge of the costs and benefits of alternative strategies" (McConnell, 1981:27). Apart from this procedural level, at a substantive level the rationality of planning often translates into town planning that places a premium on the "economic" use of land. Lewis Keeble's summary of town planning illustrates this well:

> ... the provision of the right amount of land for each use in the right place and on sites physically suited for each use. This includes the proper spatial relationship of homes and work places, of homes and schools, of homes and shopping places of various levels, and of homes with places of entertainment both indoor and out; success of course depends at least as much upon the successful arrangement of the town's road system as upon the actual selection of land uses.
>
> ... the art and science of ordering the use of land and the character and siting of buildings and communication routes so as to secure the maximum practical degree of economy, convenience ... (cited in McConnell, 1981:72-3, emphasis added).

In this search for rational and economic use of land, many planners have advocated

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[14] Planning theories are of two kinds. Procedural theories concern themselves with the process of planning. Substantive theories in turn, are concerned with the subject matter of planning, such as social welfare, economic activity and so forth (Thomas, 1982:13).

urban renewal through demolition and comprehensive redevelopment. In some places, urban planning has become a "technical problem of clearance and construction" (Ley, 1989:51). As Robert Moses, a student of Le Corbusier's, put it, "more houses in the way ... more people in the way - that's all ... When you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat axe" (cited in Ley, 1989:51). This, in essence, is the attitude that underlies the annihilation of place.

Besides the modernist view of planning, there is another significant and related reason why places that are of great importance to the people who use them, are nevertheless destroyed. This is the way in which decisions are often made by those who are not directly affected by them. There is a lack of consultation and public participation which reflects two entrenched views about planners and the planning process. The first is the view that planners are people with the necessary professional expertise and technical knowledge, and are therefore best placed to make decisions about urban form. When such views are adopted, it is not surprising that some planners are astonished when their decisions are challenged (Eversley, cited in Burgess, 1979:319).

Second, it is assumed that planners, as "disinterested scientific analyst(s)", are well-placed to determine and safeguard the "public interest" (Parker, 1972:31). In other words, they are viewed as "neutral and objective" arbiters who adjudicate between conflicting demands for scarce resources of land (Foley, 1960). It is believed that planners have an exclusive overall perspective of demands for and supplies of land, and are therefore able to apportion sites objectively in such a way that "the public interest", rather than sectarian interests, is guarded. Yet, there is no such thing as <u>the</u> public interest because general definitions of needs are not always appropriate (Meyerson and Banfield, 1955; Simmie, 1974; Burgess, 1979; and Burgess and Gold,

1982). Rather, there are different and competing interests which should be dealt with not by reference to supposedly neutral and objective arbiters but by greater attention to the specifics of any given situation -- a greater sensitivity to the beliefs, values and feelings of the people who will be affected. This is a view which advocates the "reconstitution of meaning, a new respect for subjective needs, (and) the rediscovery of cultural symbols in the built environment" (Ley, 1989:53). Similarly, as Lynch (1972, 1976) argued strongly, the users of a place should have more control over its shape and management, and not be subject to the "imposition of alien purpose" (Lynch, 1976:7). This argument is paralleled in Relph's (1981:209) concept of "environmental humility" which he offered as a way out of the vicious circle of using "ever more rational practices of management and planning to correct the destructive consequences of rationalistic management and too much planning." What environmental humility emphasises is the individuality of places, communities and landscapes. It stresses the need for a sensitivity which respects things, people and places as they are. There is no room in environmental humility for arrogance based on expertise, nor an "unthinking subservience" which abandons obligations to specialists. Unfortunately, little of this is currently evident in planning practice.

The effects of modernist planning principles and the lack of consideration for what people want (as opposed to what planners think they want) have been described and conceptualised in different ways by various writers. For example, Porteous (1988 and 1989) coined the term "topocide" to mean the deliberate annihilation of place. In his study of Howdendyke, a village in East Yorkshire, he demonstrated that attachment to place is an important aspect of human existence, and posed the question of what happens to people when their places are destroyed. His case study has many parallels elsewhere, for as he pointed out, "there is overwhelming evidence that grandiose modern planning projects, from Third World 'resettlement' schemes to

western urban renewal, have had deleterious effects on impacted social groups and can readily lead to the destruction of places ranging in size from a home or a neighbourhood to a village or small town" (Porteous, 1988:75-6). This theme has been explored over the years especially in the context of the annihilation of home and neighbourhood. For example, Fried and Gleicher (1961); Fried (1965); and Gans (1962) dealt with the impact of the annihilation of home and neighbourhood due to resettlement. In many of these instances, planners argued that a good physical environment is crucial for the promotion of a healthy and civilised life (Foley, 1960). Such environments, it was believed, would lead to a decline in vandalism, crime and individual isolation. As such, there was a need to remove any signs of overcrowding, congestion and physical blight through large scale demolition and redevelopment. Yet, as researchers like Fried, Gleicher and Gans have illustrated, what appear to planners to be slums in need of drastic physical improvement, are in fact cherished environments for inhabitants.

Neither is there evidence that a better physical environment inevitably leads to fewer social problems. In fact, Jacobs (1961) argued in The Death and Life of Great American Cities that redevelopment of slums is followed by worse social behaviour, which effectively exposes the environmentally deterministic argument as a "dangerous mirage" (McConnell, 1981:76). In other words, planners following "rational" decision-making processes, seeking "optimum" and "economic" land use patterns, and defending "the public interest", are all too often insensitive to the real needs of the people who are going to be affected by their plans. On this basis, the argument is made for greater citizen participation and various authors have called for an expanded role for the public in planning because these are the people who have to live with the changes (see for example Cole, 1974; Sewell and Coppock, 1977; and Fagence, 1977). In addition, two further arguments for public participation have been put forward, a

philosophic and a pragmatic one. The former arises from the belief that in democratic societies, individuals have the right to be informed and consulted about matters which affect them personally. The latter is based on the argument that failure to consult can prove very costly, both in economic and political terms, as when huge amounts of money are spent before construction is stalled through public opposition; or when politicians backing planners fail to obtain public support at the ballot box (Sewell and Coppock, 1977:1-2). Despite these arguments for public participation, it is often non-existent: in part because it is seen to be diversionary and disruptive, deflecting the planning process from the accomplishment of its objectives; in part because it is seen to be sustaining the participatory process for its own sake. Often, when it does happen, public participation occurs only in a limited way, on terms dictated by planners and policy-makers. As Cockburn (1977:103) illustrated in her study of Lambeth Council's management practices,

> Local people wanted participation; local councils saw advantage in 'participation' if it was on their terms. Local people wanted collective strength; local state saw advantage in 'community', but one made in its own image.

Sadly, this is no more than a charade for autocratic planning practices. Yet, what is needed is for "real power and control over environmental change (to) be given back to inhabitants" (Burgess, 1979:317).

To sum up, what I have provided in this section by way of theoretical orientation is a perspective of modernist planning built on functionalist principles. The theoretical arguments against such approaches and the related arguments for greater public participation in planning have also been highlighted. This section thus provides the wider theoretical perspectives and cross-cultural contexts with which to frame my subsequent discussions of planning and the production and annihilation of

religious places in Singapore.

2.5.5 A theoretical framework proposed

Having examined the theoretical underpinnings of my research under the four major themes, in this section, I will draw together and summarise the various conceptual threads discussed which will be of particular relevance for my study. This summary is also presented in Figure 2.1.

Drawing from the "new" cultural geography, I begin with the premise that all landscapes are both material and symbolic at the same time (Cosgrove, 1983). In this context, I draw away from "traditional" cultural geographical interests which focus on the former, and emphasise instead the symbolic meanings of religious places in Singapore. Using the metaphor of "landscape as text" (without taking on board the theoretical baggage of semiotics), my aim is to analyse the manifoldness of the text, that is, the multiple layers of meanings invested in religious buildings. Understanding these symbolic meanings involves analysis at two levels: the meanings invested by the state, and those by individuals of the various religious groups. This is in recognition of the plurality of groups, and the potential conflicts between the perspectives of a state committed to a secular ideology and those of individuals who are religiously-inclined.

At the level of the individual, humanistic geography offers various useful concepts such as existential space, sense of place, topophilia and insideness/ outsideness. I begin with the argument that religious places are centres of meaning for individuals who experience them as insiders, and the field study is designed to discover the meanings of these existential places. In addition, the religious symbolism

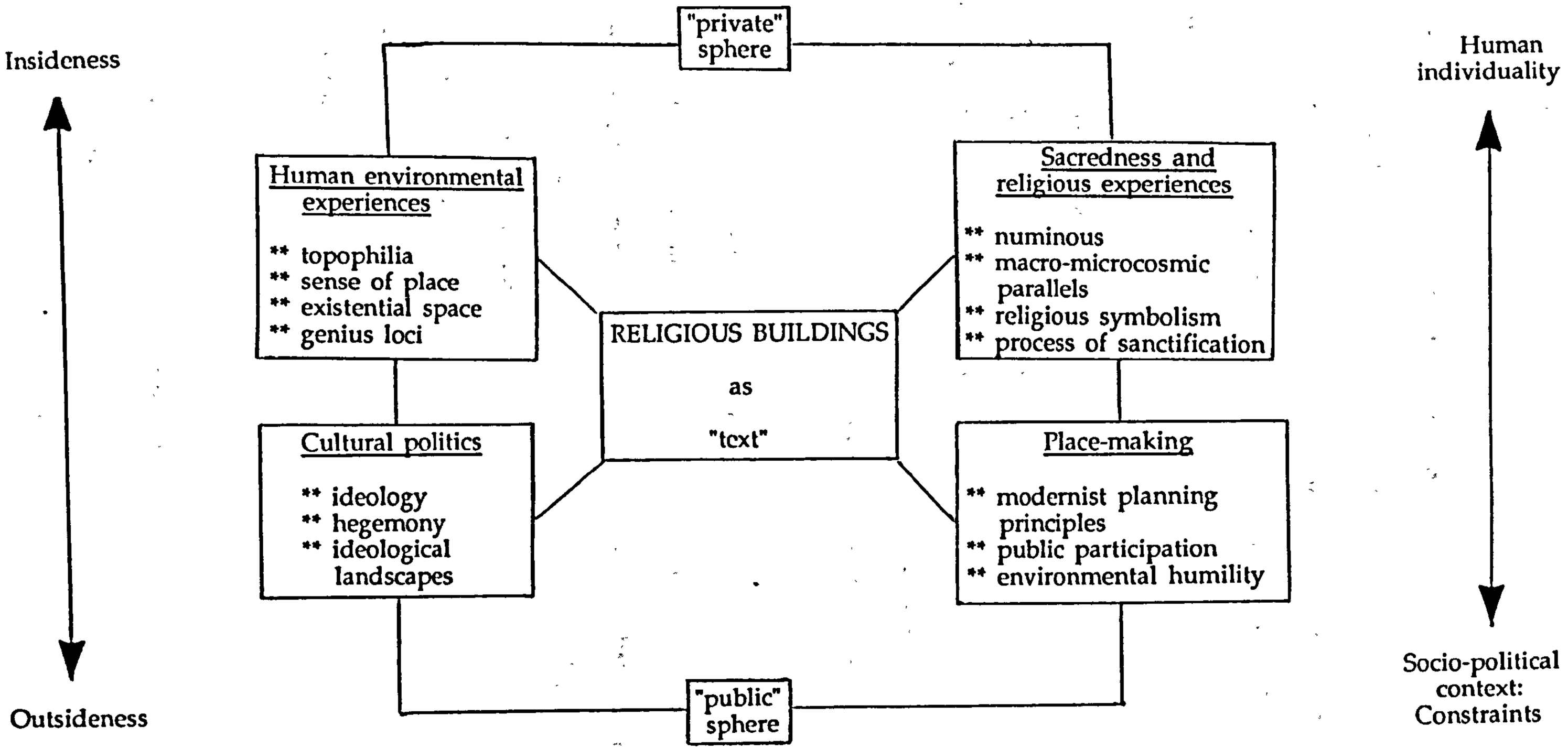

Figure 2.1: A summary of pertinent conceptual themes

and religious experiences studied by students of comparative religion and the history of religion provide useful handles with which to frame a discussion of the "sacred" meanings of places. While these perspectives provide a beginning framework, the emphasis on the individual has to be balanced with a consideration of the socio-political milieu, which leads me to the second and third aims of my study: an examination of state conceptions of religious places and the state-individual-group nexus.

At the level of the state, there are two possible ways in which the relationship with religious places can be theorised. First, religious landscapes at this level are ideological, in the sense that political use can be made of these places to objectify and "naturalise" the ideas and values the state seeks to embody. Second, at the impersonal level of planning and policy making, Relph's (1976) insider-outsider division may be useful in theorising how religious places are experienced, which will likely be at the level of objective outsideness where logic, reason and efficiency are favoured over emotional involvement with people and places. These are the modernist planning principles which emphasise functionalism. Here, a distinction must be made between the "state" as an official body of policies and the "state" as a group of individuals who may have their own religious inclinations and who may experience religious places from the position of insiders. I am not concerned with tracing the relationship between the private beliefs of individuals and the public actions they take, so conceptually, the former definition of the state will be employed.

The two levels of state and individual are not distinct and separate. Human meanings are formed, developed and moderated within the wider socio-political context. In reacting to this context, individuals and groups may align themselves in a variety of positions -- from total conflict with the state to total co-operation, with

varying degrees of negotiation and resistance in between. For instance, people may begin to adapt their meanings and accept the values, beliefs and practices set forth by the state. This is ideological hegemony. On the other hand, people may also adapt their meanings without accepting those of the state. I will return to these issues when they become significant in Chapter Seven where the state-individual-group nexus is discussed at length.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I began with an overview of the historical development of geographical studies of religion. I then began to examine more closely the problems with existing literature by discussing it in the context of "traditional" cultural geography and its problems. In the next section, I focused on current trends, discussing re-orientations both in theoretical thinking and actual empirical research. With these problems and prospects in mind, I went on to explore the way forward, with a view to developing a conceptual framework for my study. I therefore considered four main themes: human environmental experiences; sacredness, religious symbolism and religious experiences; cultural politics and ideological landscapes; and the role of planning in the production and annihilation of place. I then drew the threads together to form a theoretical framework for my study. Having covered the theoretical ground here, the next few chapters will focus on the empirical study, beginning in the next chapter with a discussion of the empirical context.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the empirical context, beginning with a short historical account of the growth of modern Singapore (section 3.2). This will be followed by a description of the social composition of the island-state, including the ethnic and linguistic profile of the population (section 3.3). The bulk of the chapter will then be given over to a description of the religious setting, including the religious profile of the population, the social profile of religious groups, religious trends in Singapore, and a more specific introduction to the major religious groups in the country (section 3.4). Following this introduction to the empirical setting, I move on to evaluate existing studies which deal with religious places in Singapore (section 3.5). Finally, in order to understand state policies with regard to religious places, it is also necessary to appreciate the urban planning context in Singapore. This will be discussed briefly in section 3.6, focusing on the guiding principles in land use development and on issues of decision-making and public participation in planning. The discussion will then be set in the wider context of the political culture in Singapore.

3.2 A brief history of modern Singapore

Modern Singapore dates from 30 January 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company signed a preliminary treaty with the local chieftain, the Temenggong of Johor, providing for the foundation of a British trading post. In the first five years of its existence as part of the East India Company, Singapore survived

and flourished economically due to its convenient location, free trade policy and comparative orderliness (Turnbull, 1989:12). Politically however, the Dutch and British were engaged in a "paper war" over Singapore because the Dutch considered it to be a part of the Riau archipelago and therefore one of their possessions. The dispute was settled in 1824 when Singapore was acknowledged as a permanent British possession. This was the result of two treaties. The first was the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in which the Malay chiefs ceded to the East India Company and its heirs perpetual title to Singapore and all islands within ten miles of its shores. The second was the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London through which the Dutch, amongst other things, withdrew objections to the British occupation of Singapore (Turnbull, 1989:27).

In 1826, Singapore became part of the East India Company's Straits Settlements, together with Penang and Malacca, taking directions from the Company's administration based in Calcutta, India. For four decades, this arrangement continued but in the 1860s, there was increasing unhappiness about Indian control in Singapore. Amongst the complaints were that Calcutta "had treated the Settlements as a part of continental India and persistently disregarded the wishes of the Straits communities" (Turnbull, 1989:70). With mounting discontent, the eventual outcome was a separation from India and a transfer to colonial rule in 1867. The Colonial Office in London took over the charge of the Straits Settlements which became a Crown Colony with Singapore as the capital.

Singapore's status as a British colony continued until December 1941 when the Japanese invaded the island and captured it from British rule. During the Japanese Occupation, Singapore became known as Syonan, and in view of the strategic and economic importance of the island, the Japanese intended it to remain a permanent Japanese colony. However, with the end of World War Two and the unconditional

surrender of the Japanese, the British returned in 1945 to crush the myth of Japanese invincibility. In 1946, Singapore became a separate Crown Colony, apart from Penang and Malacca. While the British return demonstrated Japanese vulnerability, the Japanese Occupation too had destroyed the myth of British superiority. The trust in British protection was no longer there, and the ultimate justification for colonial rule (from the perspective of the colonised) -- that is, for protection against other powers - had not been fulfilled. It was only a matter of time before a new generation of local leaders began to seek independence. In 1959, Singapore acquired internal self-governing status. By 1963, independence was granted but as part of the new Federation of Malaysia. After two troubled years, Singapore was expelled and became a fully independent state in 1965. Since then, the People's Action Party has formed the government and for 25 years was under the leadership of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. He retired in November 1990, and leadership is now held by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.

3.3 Social structure : Ethnic[1] and linguistic profile

Singapore society is characterised by its heterogeneity. The population comprises what is often termed the "CMIO" groups -- the Chinese, Malays, Indians, and "Others". In December 1989, Singapore's population of 2.703 million included a Chinese majority (2.04 million or 75.8%) and substantial Malay (413 200 or 15.3%) and Indian communities (175 700 or 6.5%). The last group, "Others", constituted 2.4% (65 100) of the population (Mirror, 15 April 1990: 12). It is listed in census categories (Khoo, 1981)

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[1] The terms "ethnic group" and "race" are both used officially in Singapore to denote the same thing. For instance, in the list of definitions accompanying the 1980 Census of Population, ethnic group is defined as "the person's race". Official terminology ("ethnic group") will be used throughout this study.

as comprising Caucasians, Eurasians, Japanese and Arabs.

Disguised under the "CMIO" label are, in fact, a far greater diversity of communities. The Chinese majority for instance, comprises several sub-groups, characterised by differences in dialect, province of origin in China[2], customs, and more so in the past than now, by differences in occupations (Cheng, 1985). These groups include the Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese, to name the main ones.[3] The indigenous Malay population, in turn, includes Malays, Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis, Minangkabau, and others. Among the Indians, South Indians predominate but there exists nonetheless, a proliferation of sub-groups. The three primary ones include the Indian Tamil community, the Malayalees and the Punjabis. Other smaller groups include the Sri Lankan Tamils, Bengali, and Sinhalese, for example. As Siddique and Puru Shotam (1982:8) pointed out, the diversity of the Indian community is reflected in the local nomenclature used to describe the various groups : "Bengalis" (for North Indians); "Klings" (for South Indians); "nanaks", "mamaks", or "tulukans" (for South Indian Muslims from the Coromandel Coast); "chulias" (for South Indian Muslim merchants); "orang Bombay" (for Gujeratis); and so forth. In short, the population reflects a tremendous diversity beyond the four main ethnic groups generally identified.

Linguistically, Singapore has been described as "one of the countries with the

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[2] This is directly applicable to some of the older generation migrants while for the majority of Chinese Singaporeans today, this would refer to their ancestral roots.

[3] These divisions were far more formalised in the past, with clan associations organised along the lines of dialect group, for instance, but these have declined in importance in the last two decades. In other words, the formalised separation between the groups has declined, and it is possible that with the increasing use of Mandarin among the Chinese population in place of dialects, the Chinese will become less obviously divided.

most complicated linguistic make-up" (Kuo, 1976:134). It was decided on independence in 1965 that there would be four official languages in the Republic -- English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. The latter three were chosen to represent the three great traditions in Singapore while English was included because of the colonial background of the state and its status as a major international language. Of the four, Malay was designated the national language, reflecting both the historical and geographical position of the country.[4] English has since become the working language and the language of administration. It is also the language of instruction in practically all schools, where it is designated "first language" status. At the same time, students must also learn another language, designated a "second language", which is generally any one of the three official languages -- Malay, Mandarin or Tamil.[5] To add to the complexity, there are more than a dozen vernaculars used alongside the official languages. For example, Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Malayalam, and Telegu are spoken by Indians, while Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese are some of the Chinese dialects used. Increasingly, however, Mandarin is being used among the Chinese population in place of the dialects, the outcome of a successful ongoing government campaign to encourage the use of Mandarin among Chinese. On top of all these, there are also significant speech variants in each language spoken in Singapore. As Kuo (1976:137) pointed out, "bazaar Malay" is not identical with "Bahasa Melayu"; and English and Mandarin are spoken in various degrees of pidginisation among different segments of the population.

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[4] Historically, the Malays are recognised as the indigenous population, while geographically, Singapore is located in the midst of what has sometimes been termed the "Malay world of Southeast Asia" (Alam Melayu), including Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, southern Thailand, and southern Philippines, all of which have significant Malay populations.

[5] Since 1981, some students have been able to learn both English and Mandarin at first language level. In the case of Malay and Tamil, this came into effect in 1986. However, only ten per cent of the student population who top the Primary School Leaving Examination qualify to do this.

3.4 The religious setting

Like the ethnic and linguistic composition, the religious composition in Singapore is equally varied. In this section, the population's religious profile will be presented (section 3.4.1). This will be followed by a focus on the relationship between religion and other social characteristics (section 3.4.2). There will then be an examination of the trends in religious adherence (section 3.4.3), followed by sub-sections that will acquaint the reader with pertinent aspects of each of the main religious groups in Singapore (section 3.4.4).

3.4.1 Profile of religious affiliation

The most recent data regarding religious affiliation among the population is that gathered in a survey conducted in January-February 1988 by the Research and Information Department of the Straits Times Press. This was part of a study commissioned by the Ministry of Community Development. In that survey (henceforth referred to as the Ministry of Community Development or MCD study), a random sample of 1015 persons aged fifteen and above from all over Singapore were asked what their religion was. The results which supercede the 1980 population census data reveal the following distribution: 28.3% of the population were Buddhists; 13.4% were Taoists; 18.7% were Christians, of which 7.6% were Catholics, and 11.1% were "Other Christians"; 16.0% were Muslims; 4.9% were Hindus; 1.1% had other religions, and 17.6% had no religion (Kuo and Quah, 1988:2) (Figure 3.1).

Certain qualifications must be borne in mind when using this data. First, information was only gathered of persons aged fifteen and above, which effectively excludes a possibly significant group of adherents "born into" religions, such as Roman

Catholics who tend to be baptised at birth. Second, the religion as professed by the respondent is accepted irrespective of how actively it is practised. Third, the definitions of Buddhism and Taoism followed that adopted in the 1980 census[6] for ease of comparison, but they also raise problems. In fact, "Chinese religion" is a far more complex and amorphous mass of beliefs than these two labels suggest. For example, many who profess to be Buddhists are not orthodox Buddhists, as the later discussion of "Chinese religion" will show. Fourth, as Kuo and Quah (1988:11) pointed out, those who participated in the survey were likely to be those who were "interested and well motivated, and those holding relatively strong views on religion." Kuo and Quah argued that this would lead to a higher likelihood of Christians and non-religionists participating in the survey. In other words, these groups were likely to be over-represented in the data presented above. These problems notwithstanding, the information remains the most recent available until the results of the 1990 census are published.

3.4.2 The social profile of religious groups

This section describes the social profile of the main religious groups in Singapore, based on the MCD study. Although figures cited here[7] are specific to that study and differ in details from other research on the religious patterns in Singapore (Clammer, 1978; Khoo, 1981; Sng and You, 1982; Hinton, 1985), the general relationships discovered are not unique to that study alone.

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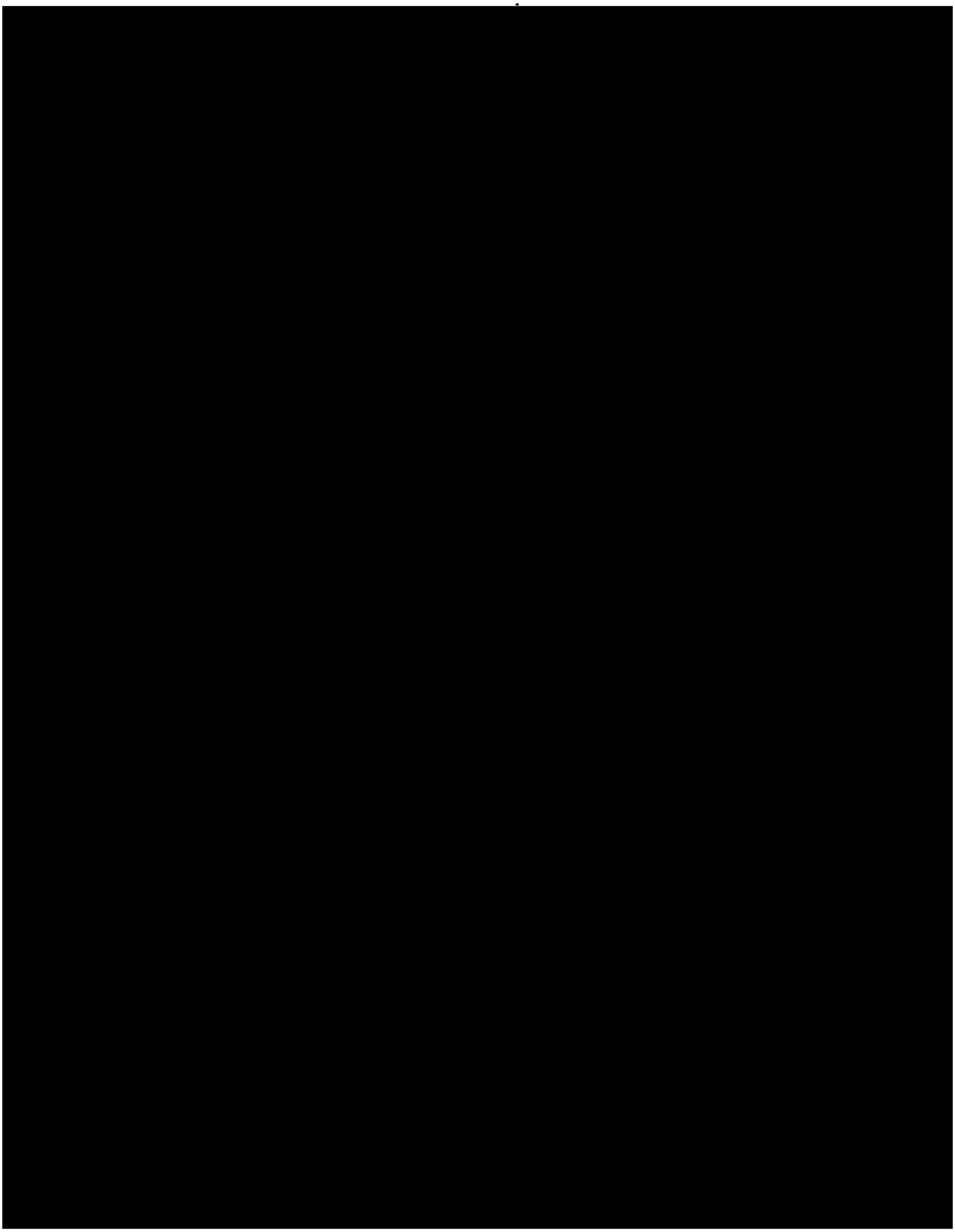
[6] Those who "believed in the religion founded by Buddha" were said to embrace Buddhism while Taoism was defined to include "persons who state that they believe in the philosophy of Lao Zi or Confucius. Those believing in ancestor worship and in various Chinese deities are also included in this category" (Khoo, 1981:21).

[7] All figures cited below are drawn from the MCD study (Kuo and Quah, 1988) unless otherwise stated.

Religion and ethnicity

Although the relationship between religious affiliation and ethnicity is not a perfect fit, there is nonetheless a generally systematic correlation. Of the three major ethnic groups, there is a virtual 100% correlation of ethnicity and religion in the case of Malays: 99.3% of Malays are Muslims (Figure 3.2). The other ethnic groups are less closely identified with one religion. For example, 55.1% of Indians claimed to be Hindus, while a significant proportion were Christians (21.3%); another 10.1% professed Islam (Figure 3.3). The Chinese population was also spread over various religions. Most (56.4%) were "Chinese religionists" (the meaning of which will become evident in the description in section 3.4.4); but a significant proportion were Christians (19.8%) (Figure 3.4). Also significant was the fact that 23.7% of Chinese had no religion while the corresponding proportions for the Indians were much reduced: 1.2%. All Malays in the MCD study professed a religion.

Based on these data, several general comments can be made. First, the Chinese and Indians tend to be more diverse in their religious affiliation than the Malays. Second, Christianity appears to be a potential common ground on which the various ethnic groups may meet. Third, a large majority of non-religionists come from the Chinese section of the population. Tamney and Hassan (1987) explained this in terms of their theory that religion is not as integral a part of the "ethnic identity" for the Chinese as it is for the Muslims and Hindus. In other words, part of being Malay is being Muslim, and part of being Indian is being Hindu, whereas to be Chinese does not mean that one has to pray to certain gods of the Chinese pantheon or practise ancestor worship. Hence, more Chinese are able to become non-religionists because it involves less of a reappraisal of their ethnic identity.



Religion and language

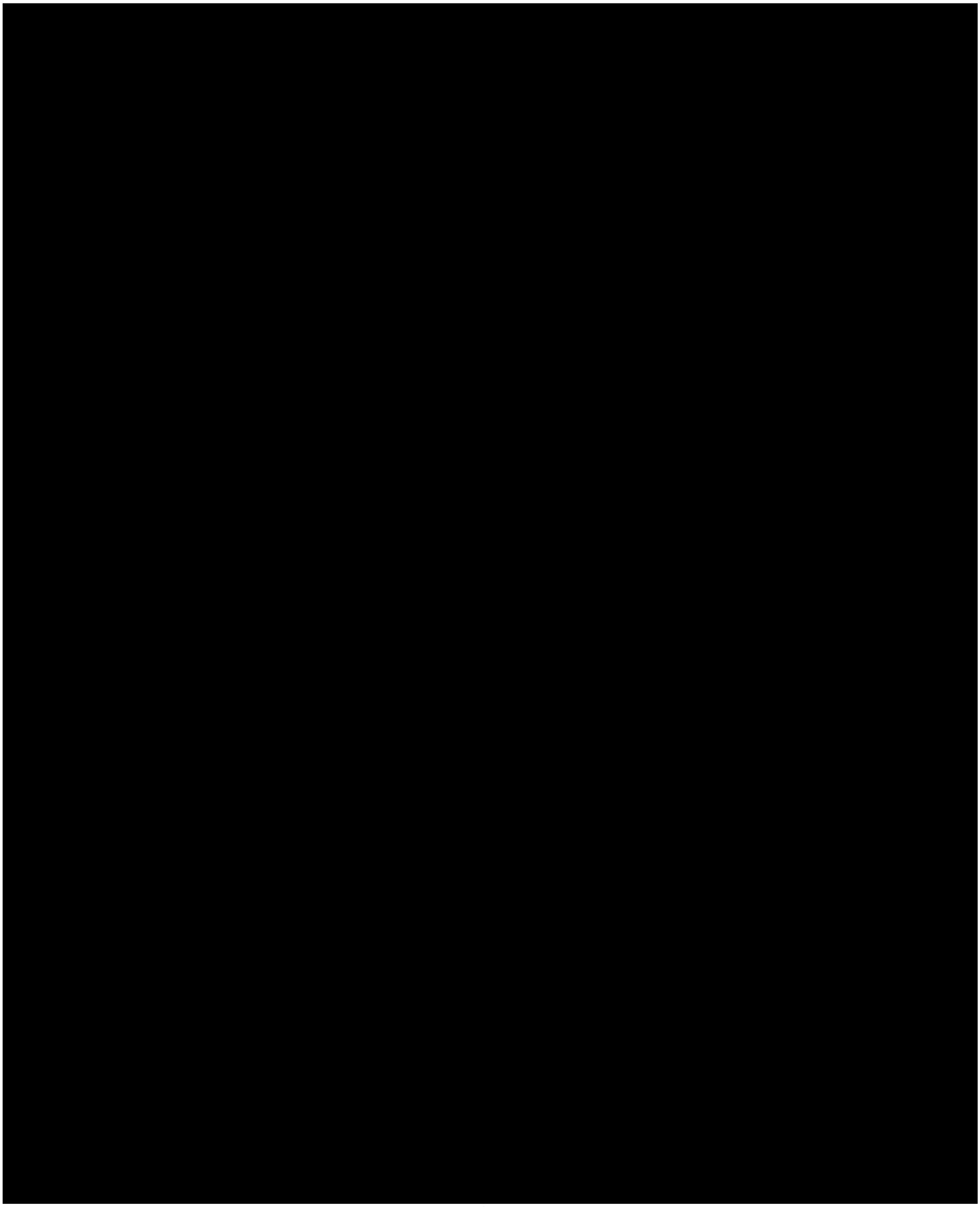
Both Clammer (1985) and Sng and You (1982) illustrated that the relationship between religion and language reflects that between religion and ethnicity. There is a strong correlation between Islam and Malay language users, just as there was a virtual 100% correlation between Muslims and Malays. Although the relationship is not as strong in the case of other languages and religions, it is possible nonetheless to detect the following relationships: Hindus tend to be Tamil-speakers; Christians tend to be English-speakers; and Chinese religionists tend to use Chinese dialects.

Religion, education and literacy

The relationship between religion and education, on the one hand, and that between religion and literacy on the other, are mutually reinforcing. In examining data on the distribution of persons according to religion and highest qualification attained, several facts become immediately apparent. The proportions of Chinese religionists and Muslims were relatively low among those with high qualifications while the proportion of Christians and non-religionists with high qualifications was much higher (Kuo and Quah, 1988:21-22) (Figure 3.5). Similarly, Christianity had the highest proportion of adherents who claimed to be literate, followed by non-religionists and Hindus, with Muslims and Chinese religionists bringing up the rear.

Religion and occupation

Because of the high positive correlation between educational qualification and occupation, it is to be expected that Christians maintain a high profile in many of the occupations requiring high levels of qualification (professional, technical, administrative and managerial). Conversely, those with less qualifications (a significant proportion of whom are Chinese religionists and Muslims) were more commonly occupied in sales and production work (Kuo and Quah, 1988:21-24).



Religion and socio-economic status

Following from many of the above relationships, it might be suggested that there is a relationship between religion and socio-economic status. Clammer (1985) contended that there is indeed a strong class bias in membership of the different religions in Singapore. Christianity emerges strongly as a religion of the upper middle class; Hinduism is largely a lower middle class religion; Muslims and Chinese religionists straddle the lower middle and the lower classes.

If monthly family income were used as the measure of socio-economic status, then the MCD study illustrates the general relationship described above by Clammer (1985). The percentage of Christians clearly increases with increasing income. In the case of "Chinese religionists" and Muslims, the percentages decrease with increasing income, making "Chinese religion" and Islam religions of the lower and lower middle classes. With Hindus, it is less clear-cut, with large percentages falling into both the lower and higher ends of the income spectrum (Kuo and Quah, 1988:23). The precise distribution of religious groups over the income groups is presented in Table 3.1.

3.4.3 Religious trends in Singapore

Information regarding the patterns of religious adherence among the Singapore population has not been collected consistently in past population censuses and there is a general paucity of longitudinal data concerning religious affiliation. As a result, it is not possible to make a comprehensive comparison of data from the various census reports in order to identify changes and trends in religious adherence over time. What are available instead are independent studies which, broadly speaking, have identified religious trends in two ways. First, Tamney and Hassan (1987) addressed the question of religious switching and have collected data from sample

Table 3.1: Religion by monthly family income

groups regarding their religious affiliation and how it may or may not have changed over the years. Through their data, it is possible to identify the religions that appear to be gaining ground and those that are losing their adherents. Second, there are various studies which present data on religious affiliation at particular points in time (Khoo, 1981; Hinton, 1982, 1985; Sng and You, 1982; Kuo and Quah, 1988), and drawing from these, it is possible to identify the following trends.

First, Christianity is the only religion gaining a significant number of converts: in Hinton's (1985:109) estimate, one per cent per annum of the total population are taking the Christian faith. This growth is generally a reflection of the growth of the non-Catholic Churches. As Hinton (1985:109) noted, there were more than twice as many Catholics as "Other Christians"[8] in 1971, but by 1980, the proportion of Catholics in the total population was 4.6% as opposed to 5.7% "Other Christians". In Kuo and Quah's 1988 data, Catholics constituted 7.6% of the population while "Other Christians" constituted 11.1% (Figure 3.6). A further distinction can be made regarding the growth of the "Other Christian" body. Growth can mainly be attributed to the charismatic churches rather than the mainline Protestant ones and the older Chinese churches. The success of charismatic churches has been explained in part by the nature of worship: lively, less inhibited, with the singing of upbeat songs and loud exhortations. It is also in part because of the emotional support afforded by the Christian fellowship in these churches (Kuo, Quah and Tong, 1988:13-15).

Second, few Muslims and Hindus have switched religions: the percentage of Muslims and Hindus in the population have remained relatively consistent over the

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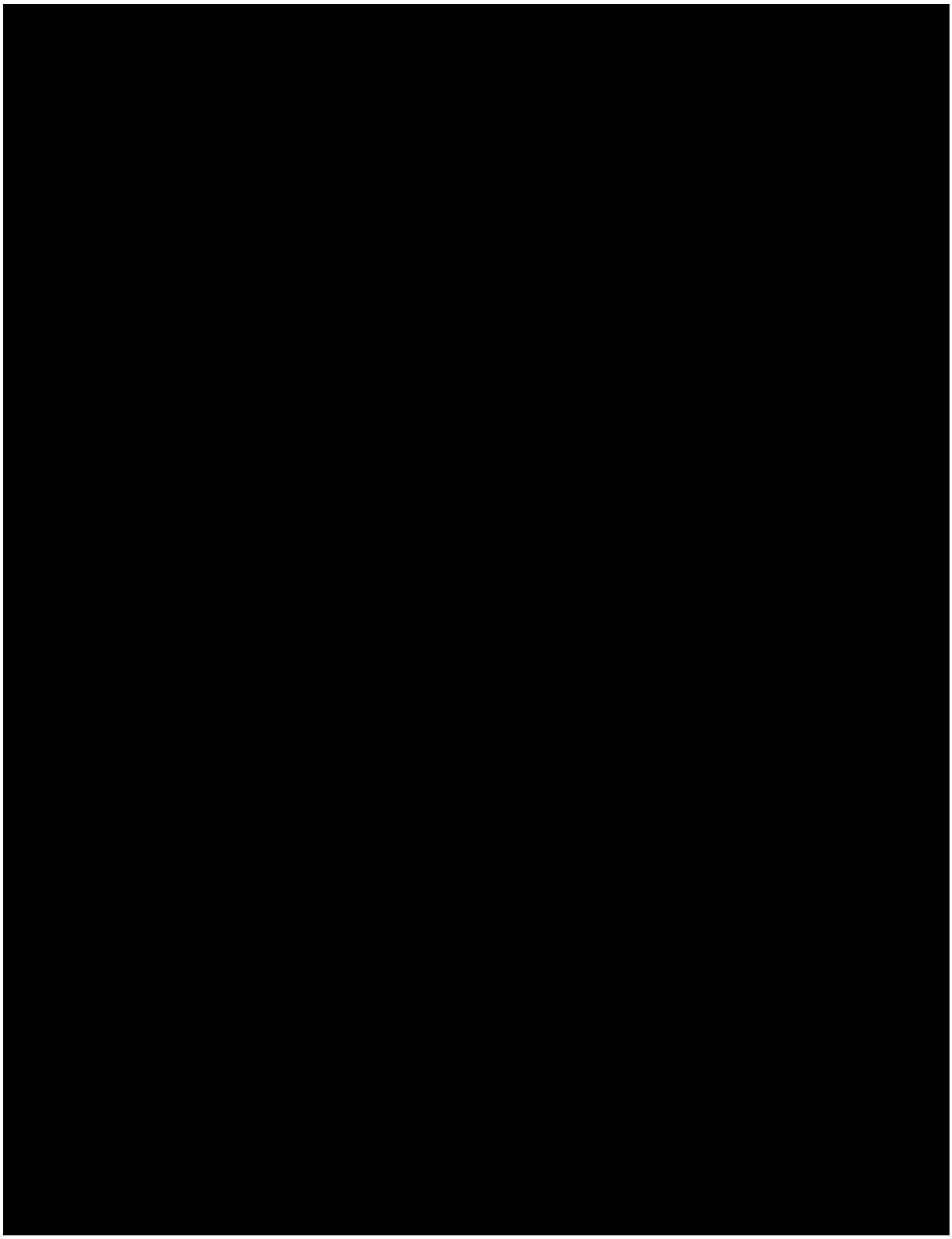
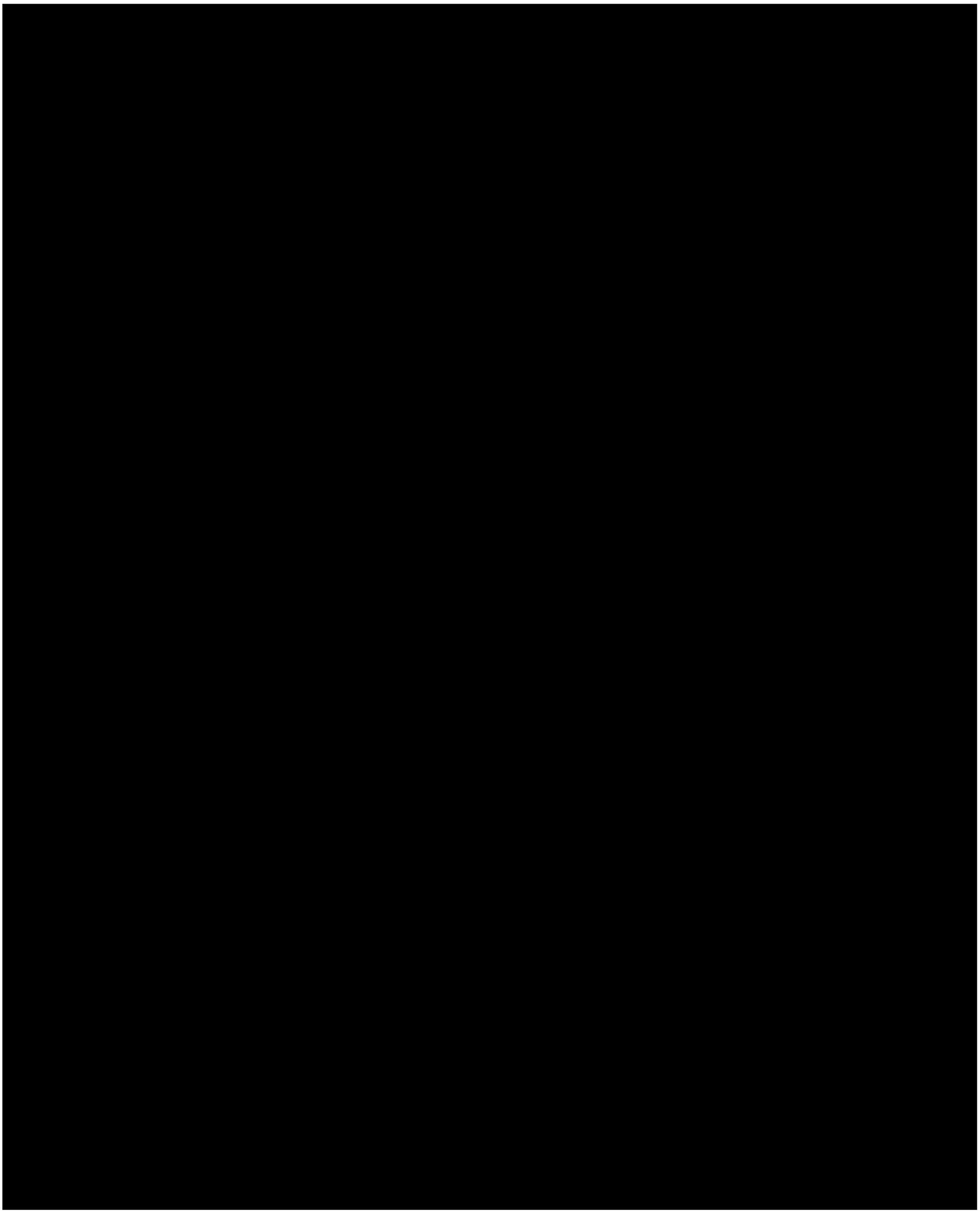
[8] I use the term "Other Christians" to refer to all denominations outside of the Catholic Church, including the mainline Protestant Churches as well as all other independent Churches found in Singapore.

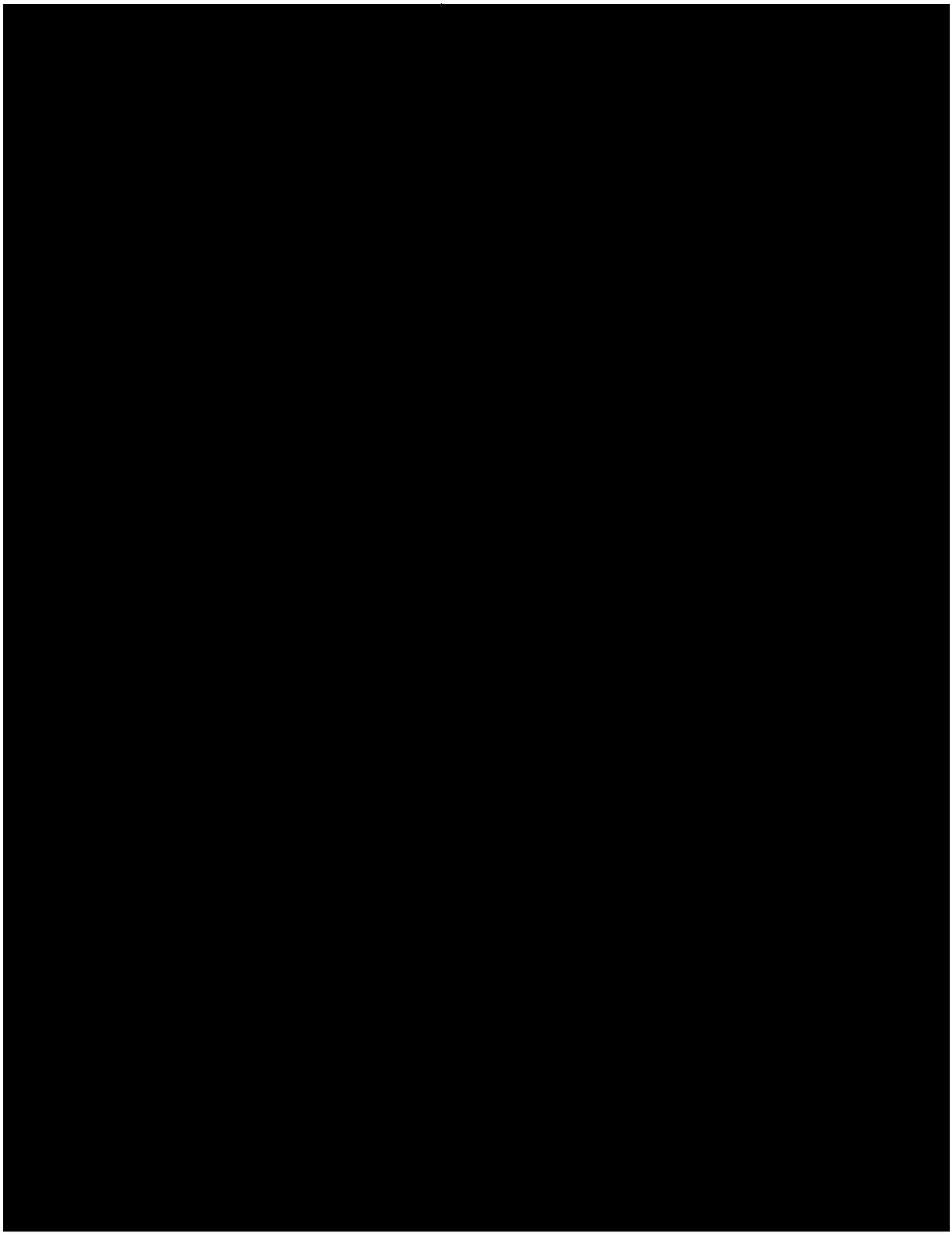


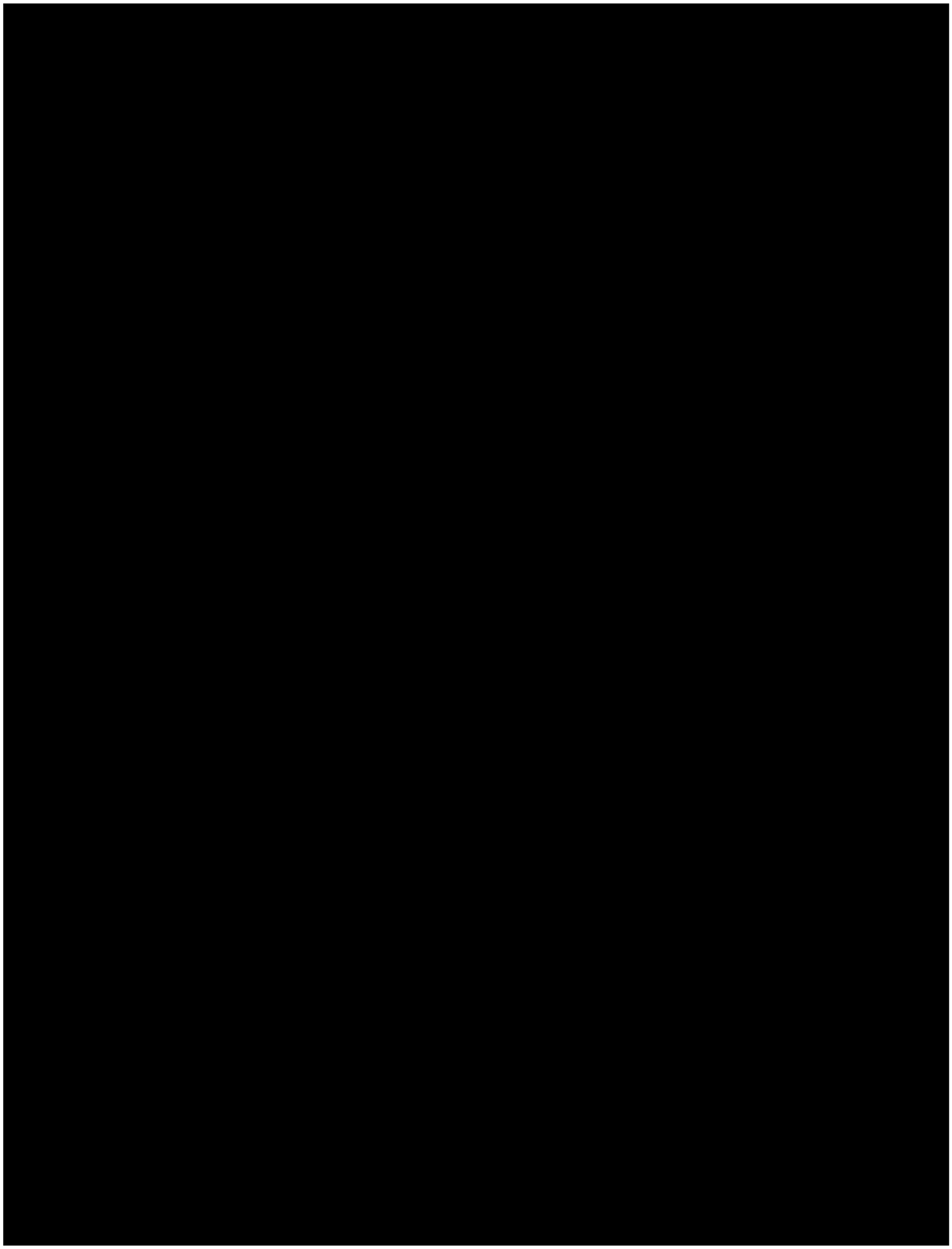
last decade (Figures 3.7 and 3.8). By contrast, Chinese religionists as a group have declined in significance. Between 1980 and 1988, the proportion declined from 57.0% to 41.7% of the population (Figure 3.9). However, within this group, it is believed that the Taoists have declined significantly while Buddhists have in fact increased slightly in proportion. Nevertheless, figures that distinguish between Taoists and Buddhists must be treated with caution since many Chinese identify themselves as Buddhists while in fact they practise a syncretic form of "Chinese religion" (see section 3.4.4). The reason why Chinese religion in general and Taoism in particular has declined is because they are viewed as "illogical", "unrealistic" and "superstitious" by younger Chinese Singaporeans. This is coupled with the lack of knowledge of the tenets of Chinese religion, resulting in many young Chinese Singaporeans turning away from the traditional religion of their parents (Kuo, Quah and Tong, 1988:15-16).

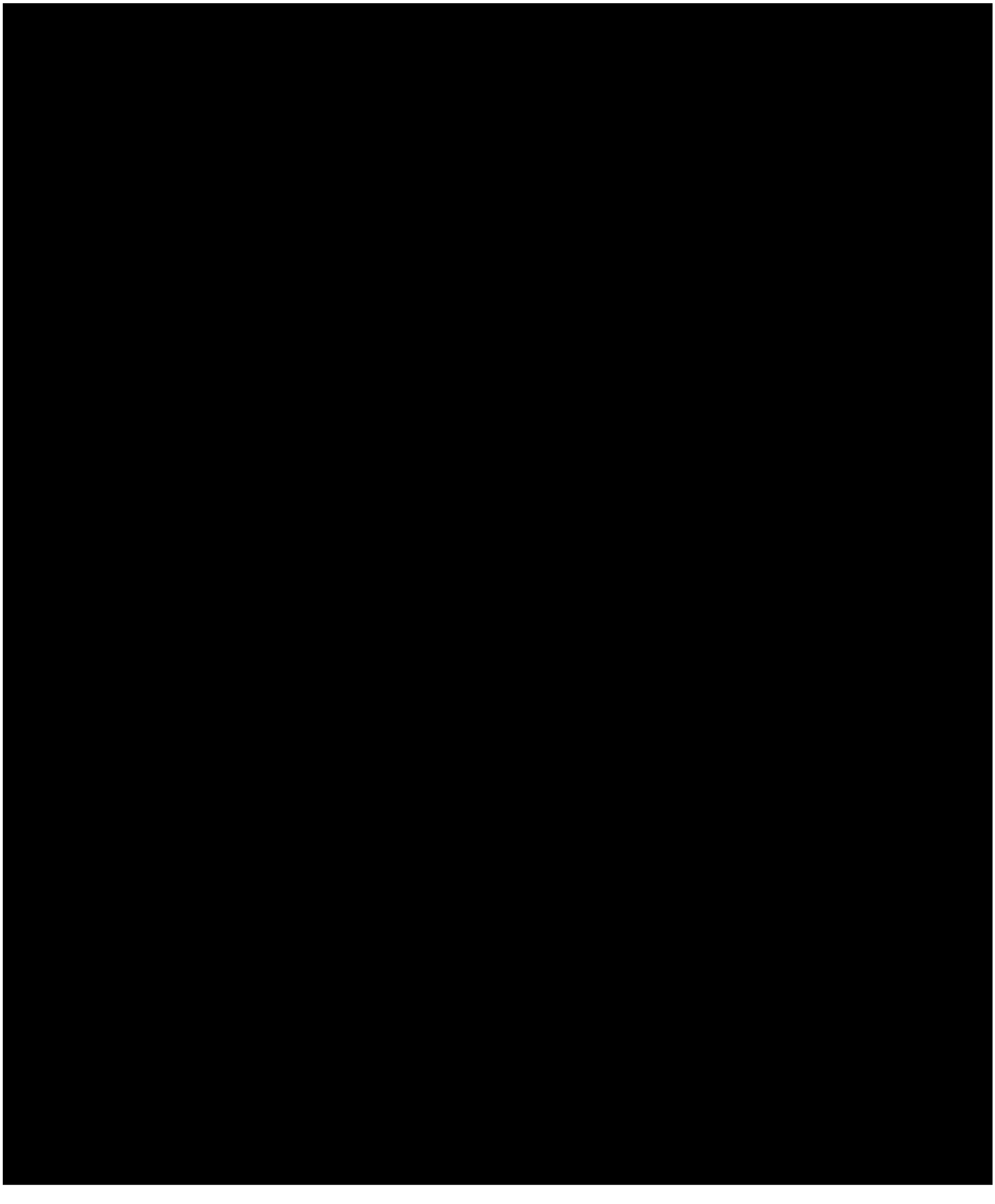
Finally, non-religionists represent the only other group that is growing aside from Christians. While in 1980 the group constituted 13.2% of the population, in 1988 the figure had escalated to 17.6% (Figure 3.10). The bulk of the increase can also be attributed to those leaving the Chinese religion. It could also represent those who are not satisfied with traditional Chinese religion but who perform some of their practices on occasions, for example, when required by family tradition (Kuo, Quah and Tong, 1988:21-22).

With the growing proportion of Christians and non-religionists and the decline in Chinese religionists, it is obvious that the latter is losing adherents to the former two. There is agreement that the group of non-religionists is gaining a slightly larger proportion than are Christians (Hinton, 1985:110; Tamney and Hassan, 1987). However, Tamney and Hassan (1987) tended to over-emphasise the gains made by non-religionists and under-estimate that made by Christians. This problem arises because









they used the 1980 census data in which the percentage of non-religionists included those who had simply failed to state their religion.

3.4.4 An introduction to the major religions in Singapore

This introduction to the major religions in Singapore will be divided into four sections, focusing on Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and "Chinese religion". Some of the aspects covered include the beginnings of each in Singapore, some characteristic features and their administration in the local context.

ISLAM

Diffusion into Southeast Asia

Much has been written about the diffusion of Islam into Southeast Asia (for example, Winstedt, 1917; Blasdell, 1942; Marrison, 1951; McAmis, 1970; and Israeli and Johns, 1984). Authors agree that, rather than being converted to the Muslim faith by the sword, Southeast Asians were won over to Islam through persuasion by Arab and Indian merchants who plied the Southeast Asian waters from the twelfth century. By the fourteenth century, Islam had become the principal religion of the region and was a part of the Malay community in Singapore at its founding.

Beliefs and practices

Singapore Muslims are primarily of the Shafii School of Law of the Sunni Islamic Sect and, as with other members of the Muslim community, subscribe to the five "pillars" of the faith, namely salat or prayer, the payment of zakat (a religious tax), the puasa (fasting) during the month of Ramadan, the profession of faith syahadat ("There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet"), and the haj (pilgrimage to Mecca). As one of the five pillars, prayers are obligatory and in Islam,

they are both congregational and private. Strict orthodox Muslims pray five times a day: just before sunrise, at noon, around four o'clock in the afternoon, at sunset and just before bedtime. These prayers can take place anywhere: at work, in school, at home, in a surau[9] or masjid[10] (Plates 3.1 & 3.2). Every Friday, all male Muslims above the age of puberty must congregate at a masjid for their noon prayers which are led by an imam[11]. The religious building in this instance is of primary significance in the practice of the faith. In Singapore, Muslims are well-served by 76 mosques spread all over the island (Figure 3.11). The surau however is declining in number as they face replacement by newer and bigger mosques.

Orthodox worship aside, the Islamic faith as practised in Singapore is sometimes also blended with local cultural practices. As writers like Mohamed Taib Osman (1967) and Johns (1961) have pointed out, Islamic elements and ideas took on new meanings as Muslim civilisation spread. One example is keramat worship in Singapore (Plates 3.3 & 3.4). In the original Arabic context, kerama (keramat, plural) was used to refer to the "marvels" performed by a wali (one who finds favour with God). These marvels are a gift bestowed by God and are not to be attributed to any innate miraculous power on the part of the wali. Orthodox interpretation would regard the miracles as deeds of the Almighty and keramat as the special gifts of persons of "high religious esteem" through whom these miracles are performed (Van Donzel et al., 1975:615-616). In Singapore, keramat worship is much more than the worship of persons of high religious standing for it incorporates elements of indigenous beliefs and Hindu influences. There is belief, for example, in keramat hidup (belief in living

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[9] Surau is the Arabic word for a small prayer house, where prayers other than the Friday congregational prayers are held.

[10] Arabic word for mosque; literally means "place of prostration".

[11] Arabic word for prayer leader.

Plate 3.1 Masjid Omar Salmah, Jalan Mashhor

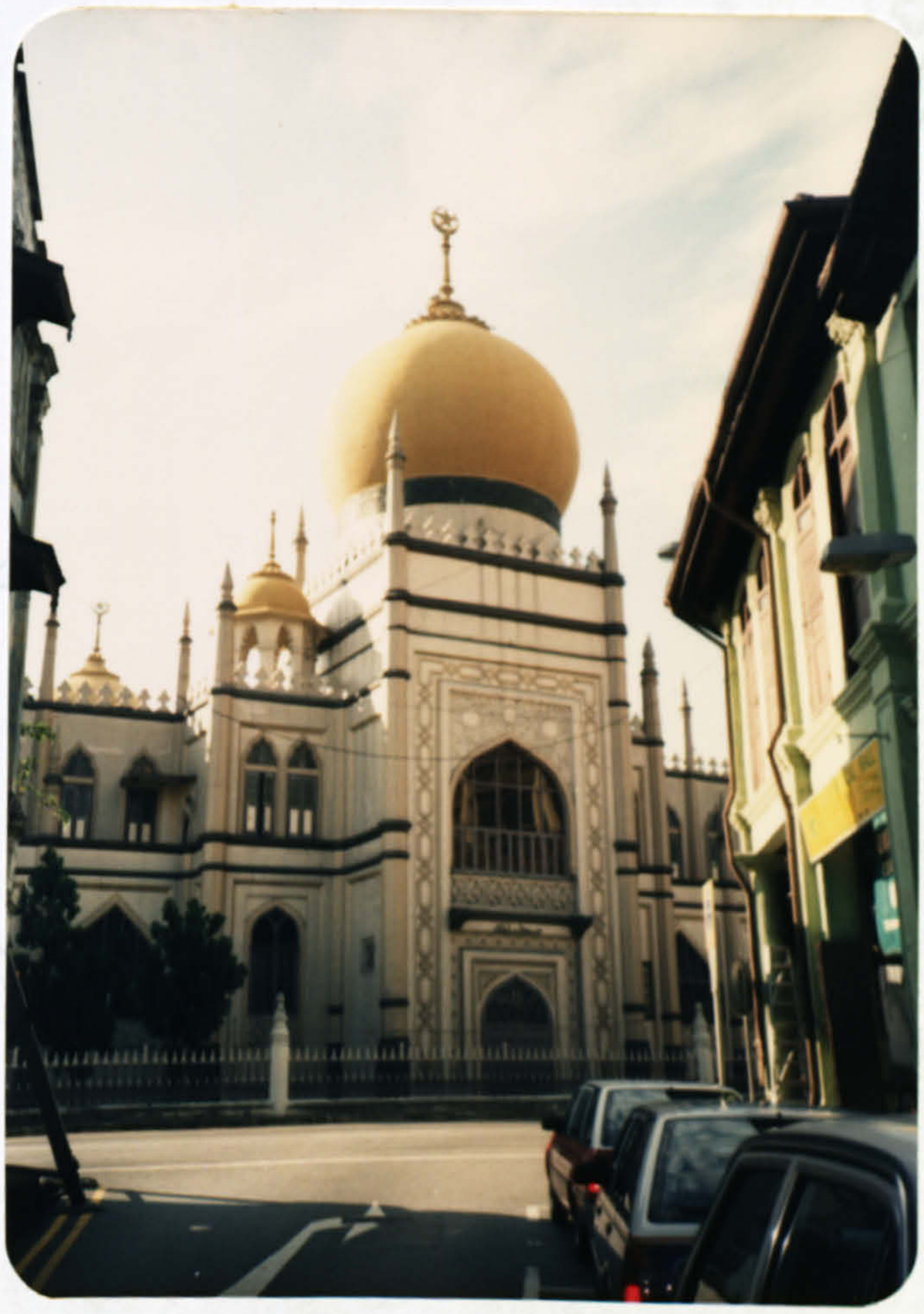

Plate 3.2 Masjid Sultan, North Bridge Road

Figure 3.11: Distribution of mosques in Singapore

Plate 3.3 Keramat Habib Noh, Palmer Road

Plate 3.4 Keramat Abdul Rahman, Kusu Island

saints and wonder-workers); animal keramat; as well as belief in keramat objects which possess magical properties (Winstedt, 1924).

Administration

Muslims are the only group in Singapore to have a special council constituted under an Act of Parliament to carry out functions beyond the administration of religious buildings and endowment funds. The Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (Muslim Religious Council of Singapore or MUIS for short) was inaugurated in 1968, empowered by the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA for short) of 1966. It advises the President on matters relating to the Muslim religion in Singapore, and at the same time carries out a wide range of other functions: for example, the collection of zakat (religious tax), the administration of wakaffs (endowments), the management of pilgrimage affairs, the registration of Islamic religious schools, the provision of bursaries and study grants to deserving Muslim students, the issuance of fatwas (religious rulings) through its Fatwa Committee headed by the Mufti (roughly equivalent to the Catholic Archbishop), the administration of mosques in Singapore, and the co-ordination of services to Muslim converts. It also runs the Mosque Building Fund Scheme established in 1975, which oversees public donations towards the building of mosques (MUIS, 1986).

Aside from MUIS, there are a large number of other Muslim organisations catering to various needs of the community, though these were formed independently of Parliament. For example, there is the Muslim Missionary Society (Jamiyah), concerned with the spread of Islam, and the Muslim Converts Association of Singapore, which sees to the needs of non-Malay converts to Islam.

HINDUISM

Origins in Singapore

Hinduism was brought into Singapore by the Indian immigrants who came as early as 1819 as part of Sir Stamford Raffles' entourage. These immigrants brought their religion with them and established temples very rapidly, propelled perhaps by an ancient Tamil adage: "Kovil illa uril Kudiyirukka Vendam" or "Do not settle in a land where there is no temple" (Sandhu, 1969:223).

The South Indian bias

Reflecting the South Indian bias in Singapore's Indian population, patterns of religious practice veer towards South Indian styles in the Republic. These are clearly evident in the way South Indian domestic religious practices, festivals and ceremonial styles prevail over North Indian equivalents. Similarly, there is a predominance of South Indian temples which differ from North Indian ones in design and iconographic style, as well as in separate priesthoods and segregated patronage. However, despite the general immiscibility of these groups, Babb (1974, 1976a) contends that there are two contexts in which there is in fact a closure between the two traditions. The first is in the context of "neo-Hinduism", a "reformist, highly intellectualized, and largely de-ceremonialized version of the Hindu tradition which is disseminated by certain organizations in the city, most notably the Ramakrishna Mission" (Babb, 1976a:192). It is favoured by Singapore's English-educated Indian elite, both North and South Indians, uses English as the medium of communication and religious practice, and dispenses with ceremonial and mythology. The second context in which the two traditions meet is mediumship where mediums, mostly men, provide the means by which other people may converse with the deities of the Hindu pantheon (see Babb, 1974).

Apart from these two exceptions, there is nonetheless a strong South Indian bias and because of this predominance, much of what follows is essentially applicable to South Indian Hinduism as evident in Singapore. Several general aspects will be highlighted to provide a background to the religion. These include the pantheon of gods, form of worship, and the places of worship.

Strictly speaking, Hinduism is a monotheistic religion. Brahman, the Universal Soul, is the one God from whom everything in the Universe stems. However, this one Supreme Being has many powers and each is represented by many different deities. The three main deities are Brahma (the god of creation), Vishnu (the god of preservation), and Shiva (the god of destruction), though a whole range of others exist as well, for example Ganesha, Mariamma and Kali. In Singapore, Hindu temples may be specifically dedicated to one or more of the deities.

Whereas weekly obligatory worship is a distinctive feature of Islam and Christianity, in Hinduism, temple attendance is not obligatory. Many rites of Hinduism such as those relating to birth, marriage and death, are in fact performed in the home. Nonetheless, the temple is still an important place of Hindu worship, festivals and ceremonies. For instance, pujas (prayers for universal good) are conducted at fixed times daily in some temples (usually around eight in the morning, twelve noon and between six and seven in the evening). Although devotees need not conform to these times, they nonetheless draw Hindus together in congregational worship. The temple is also the focal point of some festivals and ceremonies. The festival Thaipusam, for example, involves the procession of devotees carrying kavadi[12],

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[12] The traditional kavadi is a wooden arch on a wooden base, decorated with peacock feathers and supporting various offerings such as flowers and fruits, pots of milks (or sometimes sugar). In recent years, heavy metal kavadi have been used by some.

in penitence or thanksgiving, from the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple in Serangoon Road to the Thendayuthapani Temple in Tank Road (Plates 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7). Preceding the procession, much of the preparation and activity is centred in the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple and at the end of the procession, the Thendayuthapani Temple becomes the focus of activity (see Babb, 1976b).

There are at present 29 temples catering to the needs of the Hindu population in Singapore (Figure 3.12). The oldest extant temple is the Sri Mariamman Temple in South Bridge Road (Plate 3.8), constructed in 1843. It stands as probably the most important of the Hindu religious monuments in Singapore.

Administration

Two boards involved in the administration of Hindu matters in Singapore are the Hindu Advisory Board and the Hindu Endowments Board. The Hindu Advisory Board was set up in March 1917 to advise the government on matters concerning Hinduism and the Hindu community. The Hindu Endowments Board, established in 1968 under the Hindu Endowments Act, is responsible for the administration and management of four temples[13] and all the property belonging to these endowments.

Like the Muslims, Hindus also have their own organisations apart from those empowered by Parliament. The Hindu Centre is a major organisation, engaged in promoting the study and practice of Hinduism in Singapore. Its objectives are wide-ranging, including the promotion of religious tolerance, the participation in welfare projects and the organisation of lectures and discussions for the furtherance of Hinduism in Singapore (Omkara, 1981:34). Members of the Hindu community have

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[13] The four temples are Sri Mariamman, Sri Srinivasa Perumal, Sri Sivan and Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman.

Plate 3.5 Kavadi-carrier

Plate 3.6 Devotees carrying pots of milk during Thaipusam

Plate 3.7 Thaipusam: contingents of devotees

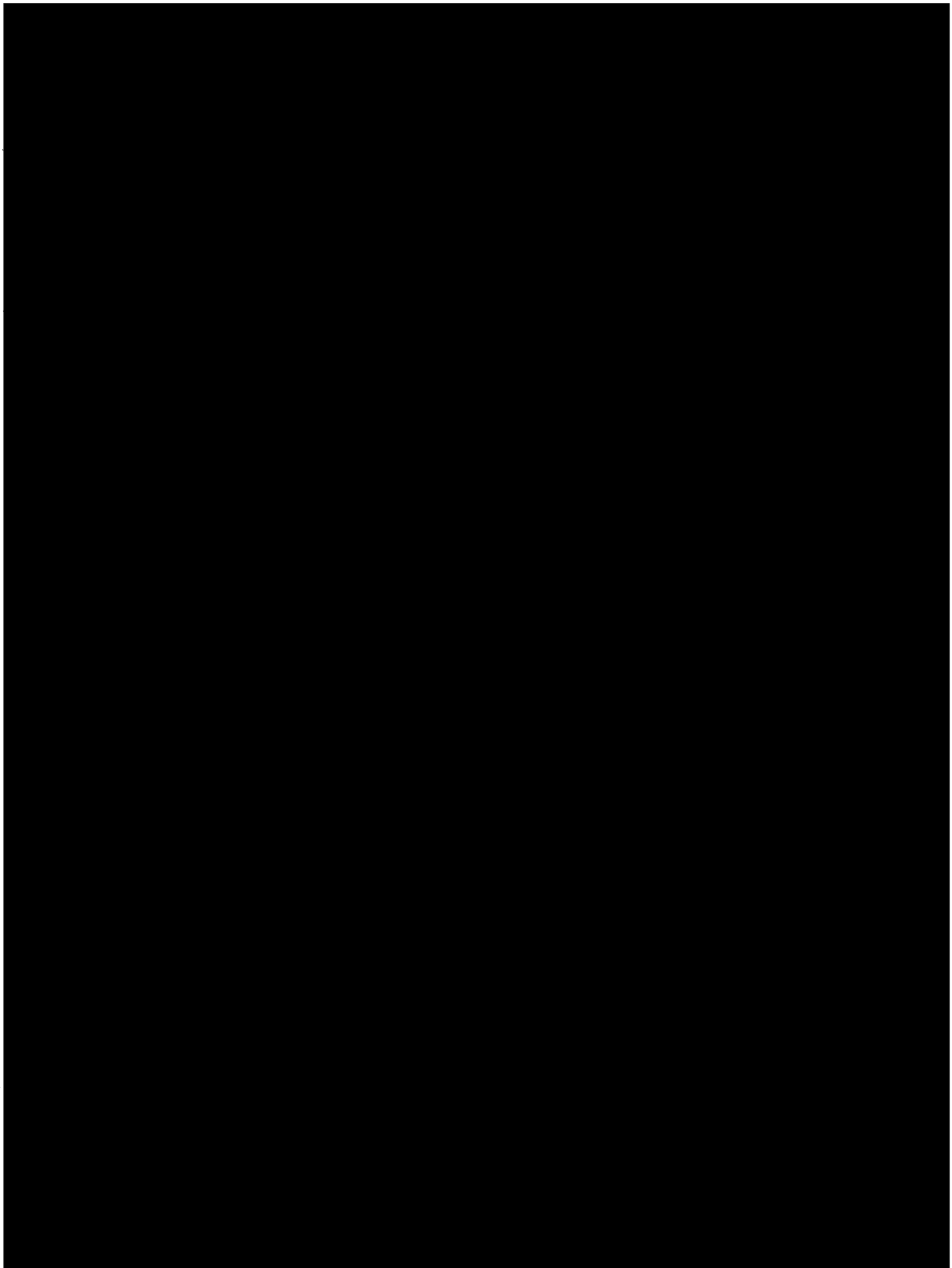

Plate 3.8 Sri Mariamman, South Bridge Road

often expressed the need for a Hindu central council much like MUIS which can bring together the many fragmented Hindu organisations and co-ordinate fund-raising and other temple activities (Straits Times, 4 September 1989). However, there are no known plans as yet to establish such an organisation.

CHRISTIANITY

The Catholic Church and a large variety of Protestant denominations can be found in Singapore. The latter include, for example, main line Protestant churches (Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans), neo-Calvinists (Baptists, Brethrens, and Bible Presbyterians) as well as other independent churches.

The Catholic Church

Origins in Singapore

Teixeira's (1963) work on the Portuguese mission in Singapore is valuable for its contribution to the understanding of the Catholic Church and its history in the Republic. He casts his eye back to the first Catholics on the island, a group of twelve Malaccan Portuguese who, in 1821, were ministered to by a missionary from Malacca. In 1825, the Portuguese mission was founded when a Father Francisco da Silva Pinto e Maia came to Singapore from Macao. In 1831, the jurisdiction of the Portuguese mission over the island was contested by the French mission centred in Siam (present-day Thailand), but this was later amicably settled and Singapore came under the double jurisdiction of the French and Portuguese missions.

Practices of Roman Catholics

Like Muslims, Catholics are obliged to participate in congregational prayers once a week. This involves the worship of God through participation in Mass every

Sunday. Additionally, there are specific holy days of obligation in the church calendar, during which Catholics should attend Mass. In Singapore, these include Ascension Day, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, All Saints' Day and Christmas Day. Catholics have a duty to receive Holy Communion frequently (at least once a year) as well as to receive the Sacrament of Penance (through confession) at least once a year if serious sin is involved. These two, together with baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage and the anointing of the sick, are the seven sacraments through which it is believed Jesus Christ gives his spirit to his people.

In Singapore, there is a certain degree of religious syncretism, particularly between Chinese religious traditions and Catholicism. This is evident in some practices of Chinese Catholics, for example, when holy water is sprinkled in homes to ward off evil spirits and when amulets with the engraving of Jesus, Mary or a saint is worn to protect the wearer from evil and accident (Low, 1973/74). Like keramat worship for Muslims, these are strictly not part of the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church but have become for some part of their religious practices.

Social services

Since its early years in Singapore, the Catholic Church has been actively involved in providing social services. Of its various involvements, the most significant contribution has probably been in the field of education. In 1852 and 1854 respectively, the de la Salle Order and the Dames de St Maur of the French Mission inaugurated Catholic mission school education, which has continued to this day. Beginning with St Joseph's Institution in 1852, there are now nineteen Catholic schools for boys (including pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, and vocational institutes); Catholic girls' schools total 31, the oldest being the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (1854), re-located from Victoria Street to Toa Payoh in 1984. These girls' schools are

spread amongst four orders – the Holy Infant Jesus order, the Canossian sisters, the Good Shepherd sisters and the Franciscan missions, and they also include schools of the various levels. In addition to these, there is also the Catholic Junior College, set up in 1974 for pre-university education.

Administration

The growth of the Catholic Church since its early days led to Singapore being made a separate archdiocese in 1972, distinct from the previous Malacca-Johor Archdiocese. It consists of five ecclesiastical districts delineated by the Church: the North, West, City, East and Serangoon Districts (Figure 3.13). Within these five districts are 27 parish churches and communities.[14] Assisting the Archbishop are three main bodies -- the Senate of Priests, the Board of Consultors, and the Ecclesiastical Tribunal. These aside, there are also an entire range of commissions, councils, committees, services and associations which reflect the activities and interests of the Catholic Church. The list is too long to name them all here, but some examples will give an indication of the type of groups to be found: the Catechetical Commission, the Lay Apostolate Commission, the Finance Commission, the Liturgical Commission, and the Archdiocesan Commission for Missionary Activity; the Singapore Catholic Schools Council; the Vocations Promotion Committee; the Catholic Aftercare (Counselling) Service, and Catholic Welfare Services; Catholic Nurses' Guild of Singapore; Society of St Vincent de Paul, Legion of Mary and so forth. The Official Church Directory and Ordo (1990) contains a list of all the church and para-church organisations under the

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[14] These include the parish churches of: Saints Peter and Paul, Sacred Heart, Our Lady of Lourdes, St Michael, St Joseph's (City District); Holy Family, Our Lady Queen of Peace, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, St Stephen, and Holy Trinity (East District); St Bernadette, St Teresa, Blessed Sacrament, St Ignatius, and Holy Cross (West District); St Joseph, St Mary of the Angels, St Francis of Assisi, St Anthony, and Our Lady Star of the Sea (North District); Nativity of the BVM, Immaculate Heart of Mary, St Anne's, St Francis Xavier, St Vincent de Paul, Holy Spirit, Risen Christ, and Christ the King (Serangoon District).

Roman Catholic umbrella in Singapore.

Places of worship

Like Islamic worship, Catholic worship is congregational and obligatory. As such, churches are a particularly important part of the religion. There are a total of 27 parish churches catering to the Catholic population all over the island, and in addition, two non-parish churches, namely the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd and Novena Church or Church of St. Alphonsus. An important feature of many Catholic churches is the accompanying parish hall in which many para-church activities are often centred -- the church library may be found there; meetings are held there, as are charity sales, for example (Plate 3.9).

"Other Christians"

History and origins in Singapore

Aside from the Catholic Church in Singapore, there are also a great variety of other Christian denominations. The older ones, established last century, include four main groups -- Anglican (1826), Brethren (1864), Presbyterian (1881) and Methodist (1885). Since the turn of the century, various other groups have taken root as well, such as the Seventh Day Adventists (1905), Assembly of God (1926), Lutherans (1927), Salvation Army (1935), Baptists (1937), Bible-Presbyterians (1952), Christian Nationals' Evangelism Commission (1952) and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (1968) (Tan, 1979/80:8; Hinton, 1985:116).[15]

Histories of individual denominations have been written for some groups, such

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[15] The precise dates of establishment cited for each denomination has varied from source to source, so the dates represented here are drawn from one of the two sources accredited. They may well contradict other sources.

Plate 3.9 Parish hall of the Church of the Holy Cross

as the Presbyterians (Harcus, 1955; Greer, 1956), the Anglicans (Loh, 1963), and the Methodists (Doraisamy, 1982; 1985). A full record of the historical development of Christianity (referring to the mainstream orthodox Protestant faith in general) is documented in Sng's (1980) book In His Good Time : The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819 - 1978. Hinton (1985), too, surveyed the history of the Protestant Church in Singapore in Growing Churches : Singapore style -- Ministry in an Urban Context. Hinton's division of this history into three periods is useful in providing a rough overview of church growth in Singapore. The first period, 1819-1930, was characterised as one in which Christianity grew slowly for a variety of reasons, ranging from Singapore's multiplicity of languages which made missionary endeavour difficult, to the fact that immigrants expected to return to their homelands and were thus not prepared to make permanent and major religious changes. The second period from 1900-1950[16] was characterised as a period in which the "seeds of hope" were sown, as immigrants began to settle down and the "temporary immigrant" mentality shifted. The third period, from the 1950s to the 1980s, or "harvest time", was a period in which new denominations were established. New congregations also grew among the older denominations.

Social services

Traditionally, the older established denominations have been involved in education and health, and this is reflected today in the schools and services which have been set up. The Methodists, Anglicans and Presbyterians have contributed particularly to education, with seventeen schools of various levels among them. Similarly, the Church has been involved in the provision of health services through

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[16] The overlap between the first two periods (1819-1930 and 1900-1950) is found in the original text. Presumably, Hinton (1985) meant that the thirty years from 1900 to 1930 were years of change and transition.

the St Andrew's Mission and Orthopaedic Hospitals, Mount Alvernia Hospital, and Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital, for example. In 1969, counselling services were initiated; in 1976, the Christian Anti-Drug Rescue Endeavour (CARE) was established as well.

Places of Worship

The number of "Other Christian" churches has grown prodigiously since the establishment of the first London Missionary Society chapel in 1825-6 in Bras Basah Road. Although the Roman Catholic population (40.6% of the total Christian population) and the Protestant population (59.4%) differ in strength, the difference is not reflected in a commensurate manner in the number of churches belonging to each group. Whereas there are 29 Roman Catholic churches in all, there are about 300 Protestant churches. In part, this is because Catholics, with their sacramental approach, are not as free to use laity and house churches as Protestants are (Hinton, 1985:109-110). In turn, Protestant groups have become distinctive in recent years in their use of secular buildings for religious worship. For instance, the Methodist church has taken over the Metropole Cinema in Tanjong Pagar which had fallen into disuse (Plate 3.10). In contrast, certain places are used only periodically (such as over weekends) while generally fulfilling other functions at other times. The World Trade Centre auditorium is one example which is used for worship on weekends by some Baptist groups. Hotel rooms are also used very often, as are school halls (Plate 3.11).

"CHINESE RELIGION"

"Chinese religion", which I use here as a collective term to describe the myriad beliefs adhered to by the majority of the Chinese population, is by far, the most

Plate 3.10 Fairfield Methodist Church, Maxwell Road

Plate 3.11 Clementi Methodist Church, Dover Road

difficult to characterise. This is due primarily to the eclecticism of the religion which is reflected in the varied nomenclature adopted to describe it. For example, Elliott (1955) termed it "shenism", which he derived from the fact that when asked for their religion, most Chinese would respond with "bai shen" (praying to the spirits). Topley (1954, 1956, 1961), who has researched the various Chinese religious practices, institutions and associations in Singapore, termed it the "anonymous religion". Comber (1954, 1955, 1958), in turn, refered to it as the "religion of the masses". More recently, Clammer's (1983) introduction to a volume of works on contemporary Chinese religious practices in Singapore and Malaysia characterised it as "Chinese folk religion". Nyce (1971) similarly adopted that terminology. Wee (1976) has attempted to clarify the status of these various strands of Chinese religions by using Buddhism as an organising base line. She distinguished between Buddhist systems which refer directly to specific Buddhist canonical traditions (Theravada and Mahayana schools) on the one hand; and those which have no direct Buddhist canonical reference, on the other. Of the latter, there are two groups: "shenism" (no canonical tradition of any kind); and "sectarianism" (with each sect having its own canonical tradition).

In attempting to understand religion among the Chinese in Singapore, a consideration of all of the above leads to the following characterisation. Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism are represented in Singapore, the latter far more so than the former. Wee (1976) has provided a clear discussion of these two canonical traditions of Buddhism, including the historical background, theology, institutions and personnel in each case. In addition, a Japanese branch of Buddhism, the Nichiren Shoshu Association is also growing in significance (Clammer, 1988:27-8).

Apart from these Buddhist traditions, there is also Confucianism. Although it is sometimes argued that Confucianism is not a "religion" but a moral code or

philosophical system, Leo and Clammer (1983) noted that in Singapore, Confucius is regarded by some as a specific deity in his own right, worshipped apart from other deities and constituting the centre of a specific religious complex. Confucian teachings form the backbone of thought and in that, common ground is shared with non-religious Confucianists' veneration of Confucius as a sage and for whom Confucianism is a philosophical basis of Chinese culture.

Ancestor worship is also an important element of Chinese religious practices. It has sometimes been described as an extension of filial piety, an important value in Chinese society and strongly rooted in Confucianist thought. In this practice of ancestor worship, ancestors, as with many of the other gods of the Chinese pantheon, have a role to perform in providing guidance and protection for the living descendents. In return, the latter will reciprocate by offering food (the essence of which the dead ancestors will distil) and paper models of daily necessities (clothing, vehicles, money, and more recently, television sets, video recorders, washing machines and even credit cards). Such is the manifestation of mutual care between generations, as much a part of the relationship between the living and the dead, as it should be among the living. In another very important sense, ancestor worship also acts as a "stimulus to morality" (Addison, 1925:26), for the consciousness that the ancestors are watching and will judge and reward or punish according to one's conduct, heightens the moral sense of the community. In short, ancestor worship is undoubtedly a significant part of Chinese religious life. Indeed, Addison (1925:83) and Hinton (1985:44) argued that it is the most important religious phenomenon in the life of the Chinese. However, it is seldom seen as composing a distinct religion (Tamney & Hassan, 1987:4), and is regarded more as a part of Chinese religious life in general.

Although Taoists have been regarded as a category in both the 1980 census

(Khoo, 1981) and the 1988 MCD survey on religions (Kuo and Quah, 1988), it is doubtful that many Singaporeans can meaningfully be labelled as religious Taoists. This is because Taoism was used as a catch-all category in the census, including those who "believed in the philosophy of Lao Zi or Confucius, or who practised ancestor worship or who worshipped the various Chinese deities" (Khoo, 1981:20). What is probably more common among Chinese religionists in Singapore are syncretic religions which incorporate elements of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as well as ancestor worship, and other elements of animistic folk religions. As Hinton (1985:31) described it, "the religion of the Singaporean Chinese Religionist is an ancient, rather animistic folk religion infused, to a small degree, by a selection of often modified beliefs and practices from the so-called high religions ..." Once again, in borrowing Wee's (1976) categorisation, the syncretic religions include sectarianism and "shenism". Sectarian religions include for example, Sanyi Jiao (Three-in-one doctrine); Zhenkong Jiao (The Doctrine of the True Void); Xiantian Dadao (The Great Way of the Former Heaven); and Dejiao (The Moral Religion), to name a few of the main groups. They include in their canons various strands of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist thought.

"Shenism" is probably what best characterises the religion of a vast majority of Chinese in Singapore and this is amply reflected in the substantive amount of research focused on it (for example, Elliott, 1955; Heinze, 1979, 1981; Ju, 1983; and Cheu, 1988). Unlike the above sectarian religions, it has no canonical tradition. It is cultic, with each cult centred around a particular shen (spirit), whose chief mode of communication with this world is through spirit-mediums. It is syncretic, for the "shenist" pantheon can include Confucius, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, alongside any other spirit, deified hero or emperor. Even Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary are considered by some as shen. Indeed, as Wee (1976:173) pointed out, "shenists" have the habit of taking over deities of other religions by treating them as shen (Plate 3.12).

Plate 3.12 A multi-religious shrine, Owen Road

Perhaps the best way to characterise "Chinese religion" in Singapore is to dispense with labels and to consider the distinguishing features of the religion. In this, reference may be made to Hinton (1985:33-4), who set down some distinctive traits. Chinese religion is result-oriented and highly pragmatic; it is problem-oriented; it is this-worldly and materialistic, individualistic, and highly concrete and action-based rather than philosophically-oriented. This is true to a large extent of the syncretic religions, particularly "shenism" but possibly less true of the "high religions" (like Buddhism), when they are practised in "unadulterated" form, according to canonical tradition. In this present study, when the term "Buddhist" is used, it will refer to Buddhists of the Theravada and Mahayana schools, as well as those belonging to the Nichiren Shoshu Association. "Traditional Chinese Religion" will refer to the syncretic religions described above, while "Chinese religion" will refer to the entire collectivity.

Places of worship

Temples

Like Hindus, Chinese religionists are not obliged to participate in weekly congregational worship. Indeed, they may visit temples at any time, as often as they please, and as many as they desire. One of the beliefs of Chinese religionists is that different gods have different powers, and to get a multiplicity of blessings, one would have to pray to many gods and visit many temples. In a survey of 170 temples in Singapore, Lip (1983:29) identified 54% to be syncretic (Plate 3.13), almost 36% to be Buddhist (Plate 3.14), and less than 6% to be Taoist (Plate 3.15). In addition, Topley (1956:95) also identified ancestral temples, owned and run by associations of Chinese for the worship of ancestors. There is also one temple dedicated to Confucius (Leo and Clammer, 1983). It has been found that of all the temples, the syncretic ones were more popular than the others because they contained deities of all categories of

Plate 3.13 Fuk Tak Chi, Palmer Road

Plate 3.14 Buddhist temple, Jalan Bukit Merah

Plate 3.15 Wak Hai Cheng Bio, Phillip Street

Chinese religions (Lip, 1983). In terms of ownership and management, each temple may be in private hands or owned and managed by clans or associations. Private owners could be nuns (ni gu), lay nuns (cai gu),[17] monks or devotees. Clan and association temples, on the other hand, are generally managed by committees and are in the care of trustees or in the charge of a resident chief monk.

Residential places of worship

In addition to temples, Topley (1956) has also identified residential places of worship, of which there are three categories : Buddhist "nunneries" for ni gu (nuns) and cai gu (lay nuns); Buddhist monasteries in which ordination takes place; and cai tang, literally translated as vegetarian halls, in which women (generally) who are not ordained nuns but who wish to live away from the world, can find refuge. A large number of such halls in Singapore belong to the sect Xiantian Dadao.

Buddhist centres

Not all who identify themselves as Buddhists engage in prayer and worship. Rather, they meditate. For such purposes, there are Buddhist centres, such as the Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Butterfly Avenue. They are open to individuals for meditation, to groups for meetings, discussions and talks, and often house a library of Buddhist literature.

Administration

Chinese religionists as a group do not have an umbrella administrative body to take care of their needs. Instead, there are a variety of organisations which cater

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[17] Topley (1956) defined ni gu as nuns of the Buddhist order while cai gu are lay nuns: women who do not shave their heads but enter the Buddhist faith by taking a teacher and pledging allegiance to Buddhism and the Buddhist law.

to different segments of the entire group. Buddhist organisations are probably best represented. There is, for example, the Buddhist Union, the Singapore Buddhist Sangha Organisation, and the Singapore regional centre of the World Buddhist Federation. In addition, the Singapore Buddhist Federation is probably the highest level organisation amongst Buddhists; it seeks to unify all Buddhists in Singapore in the observation of Buddha's precepts, the propagation of the Dharma, the promotion of activities conducive to Buddhist education and for the benefit of society. Taoists, on the other hand, have existed without any central organisation for a long time. Only in March 1990 was a central body, the Taoist Federation of Singapore, set up to promote Taoism and co-ordinate the activities of various Taoist groups.

3.5 The study of religions in Singapore: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

Having introduced the religious setting, I intend in this section to acquaint readers with existing research on religions and religious issues in Singapore. The literature is fairly large and covers a range of perspectives. No review of this interesting literature exists and while it is tempting to provide such a survey and commentary here, I have chosen instead to focus specifically on studies which have a direct bearing on my research.

Two major bodies of research exist. The first examines religions in Singapore from a historical perspective while the second focuses primarily on contemporary issues. The majority of existing research from a historical perspective is useful in providing some historical background to the religions in Singapore but it does not

bear directly on my study.[18] The only work of a historical nature that I am aware of which feeds into my research is that by Kho (1979/80) who examined the relationship between religion and state in Singapore between 1959 to 1978. The study is a collation of state policies towards religion during the years under review, and forms a useful source of information for Chapter Six which examines the relationship between state, ideology, religion and religious places in Singapore. The body of literature that deals with religions in Singapore from a contemporary perspective is wide-ranging, including sociological, anthropological, political, and legal viewpoints. From among this large variety of works, I will focus directly on research dealing with religious places, and will organise the material primarily around the major religious groups.

Research on Islam in Singapore covers a variety of aspects,[19] including the places of worship: surau, mosques and keramat. The study of surau by Kern (1956) is purely descriptive, concerned only with tracing its origins. On the other hand, studies of mosques recognise the changing roles of mosques in Singapore. Mansor Sukaimi (1983), for instance, has studied the roles played by "new generation" mosques in Singapore. Full recognition is given in the study to the fact that mosques in Singapore have changed in character and function. While in the past, many were small and originally designed with facilities meant primarily for prayers, the new

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[18] This body of literature deals with the historical conditions under which various religions have developed and flourished. See for example Netto (1961) and Arasaratnam (1970) for Hinduism; Blasdell (1942), Marrison (1951) and McAmis (1970) for Islam; Loh (1963), Teixeira (1963), Sng (1980), and Doraisamy (1982 & 1985) for Christianity.

[19] Studies include for example the role of the Shariah Court and the legal status of Muslims (see for example Djamour, 1966; Bartholomew, 1970; and Hooker, 1983); the Islamic concept of the ummah or community (Tamney, 1970); missionary efforts in Singapore (Ma'arof Salleh, 1977); and the role of the Muslim Religious Council in Singapore (Siddique, 1986).

mosques are now "socio-religious institutions" (Mansor Sukaimi, 1983:3) fulfilling more roles than just places of worship. They are at the same time educational institutions, spiritual centres, council chambers for the deliberation of community affairs, community-service centres, secretariat offices and so forth. By describing these new functions, the author paves the way for a discussion of how the meanings and values invested in mosques have changed over time. In addition, Siddique's (1990) paper on Singapore's mosques focused on their evolution as an institution and the changes as well as continuities in terms of establishment, management, funding, activities and functions. Like Mansor Sukaimi, she contributes to an understanding of the contemporary position of mosques in Singaporean Muslim community life.

In a similar vein, Mohamed Nahar's (1984/85) study of keramat in Singapore also recognised, among other things, the changing face of keramat-worship in Singapore as urbanisation increasingly transforms the cultural landscapes and relatedly the availability of and access to keramat. This is opposed to other studies of keramat which are purely descriptive (for example, Winstedt, 1924).

Research on Christianity in Singapore is varied[20] but few studies deal directly with Christian places of worship. An exception is the work by Tan (1979/80), which deals with church architecture in Singapore since 1950. The study is concerned with the types of church architecture in Singapore, ranging from neo-classical to neo-eclectic, from romantic to organic. The factors influencing the architectural character of churches in Singapore are also examined in terms of, for example, liturgy, new

[20] Christianity has been researched in terms of changing trends (Clammer, 1978; Sng and You, 1982) and the contributory factors towards church growth (Hinton, 1985). Other research themes include the role of Christian schools in conversion (Lau, 1976/77); the charismatic movement in Singapore (Lim, 1981/82); secularisation and Christianity (Chua, 1983/84); and specific Christian communities, such as the Catholic Vellala (Stephens, 1982/83) and the Teochew Catholics (Low, 1973/74).

materials, and technological innovation. However, more significant than his analysis of existing church architecture is his proposal for a future church architecture, which represents an attempt to relate "social change" with "the economic, cultural and architectural environment" (Tan, 1979/80:115). With the increasing Christian population and the scarcity of "buildable land", Tan (1979/80:115-148) proposed the concept of a multi-denominational, multi-use church complex and proceeded to consider how this is possible architecturally (in terms of the spatial requirements of a multi-denominational church; horizontal and vertical zoning of space; flexibility in the use of space, including furniture design and so forth). While it is an innovative idea within the context of Singapore, it reflects an approach which accepts without question the restrictions imposed by the state (amount of space for building churches; height restrictions for churches). He worked within these restrictions, without questioning or clarifying these controls. While Tan acknowledged the potential problems of intermixing denominations in one building in terms of potentially incompatible doctrine, liturgy and organisational structure, he took no account of problems on a more personal level. For example, he did not consider how people may face problems in developing a meaningful relationship with a place that is constantly changing form: when altar, communion table, lectern and pulpit shift from one position to another as the Liturgy requires; and as rooms take on different functions at different times. Furthermore, if, as Tan suggested, furniture be made of light and mobile material, such as plastic or fibre glass to facilitate movement, the physical appearance of multi-denominational churches would be very different from established uni-denominational churches as we now know them. It begs the question of whether part of the meanings people invest in churches are tied up with the physical appearance of churches and if so, how altered would these meanings be if the physical appearances were also altered. This question will emerge again in Chapter Five in the discussion of my empirical material.

Despite its shortcomings, Tan's (1979/80) study did recognise that the religious scene is a dynamic one as groups grow and needs change. With this as a baseline, many more unexplored research possibilities present themselves. No proper study, for example, has been done of the increasing use of secular buildings such as disused theatres and cinemas, public auditoriums, school halls and hotel rooms for religious functions. Only a short essay exists on the architectural transformation of a cinema into a church (Chua, 1988b) and it deals only cursorily with some important issues -- the theological position of the Protestant Church regarding the significance of churches; the "ground level" responses to such a theological position; and the symbolic meanings of the architectural transformations. Neither have studies been done of the significance of church halls as a centre of activity. These themes provide abundant potential for empirical research.

Chinese religion in Singapore has probably generated the largest amount of research.[21] Concomitantly, more studies have also been done on their places of worship. Studies have focused variously on the origins, structure, functions and inhabitants of temples. Comber's (1958) study, for example, examined briefly the ownership of Chinese temples, spirit medium activities in temples, and provides a guide to some Chinese temples in Singapore in terms of the origins, location, main deities and some of the unique physical features of the temples. It is a highly descriptive work and is useful only as a collation of information about a selection of

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[21] One group of studies seeks to clarify the status of these religions, given the amorphous nature of Chinese beliefs (see for example Topley, 1961; Nyce, 1971; and Wee, 1976). There are also specific studies of particular syncretic groups or spirit medium cults, often from an anthropological perspective (for example, Elliott, 1955; Topley, 1957; Heinze, 1979, 1981; Ju, 1983; and Tan, 1985). In addition there are studies of particular practices and rituals (Topley, 1953, 1954; Comber, 1954; Heinze, 1983; Choong, 1983). The organisation of religious institutions and associations such as monasteries, nunneries and "vegetable halls" have also been researched (Topley, 1954, 1956, 1961; Gamba, 1966; and Hsieh, 1978).

temples. Lip's (1978, 1981, 1983) studies of Chinese temple architecture in Singapore are well-cited, though in many parts, the studies are similar to Comber's descriptive history of the temples. Her contributions lie in her limited analysis of the role of feng shui (geomancy) in site layout and planning of Chinese temples. She also discusses the symbolic themes in Chinese temple decoration. For example, she recounts the symbolic significance of dragons adorning roof ridges, the popularity of bats and tortoises in wall engravings and so forth. However, these are well-documented in studies of Chinese symbolism and art motives (see for example Williams, 1932 and Eberhard, 1983). Lip adds little in terms of discussing the information within any kind of theoretical framework. What her work illustrates is that the "producers" of Chinese temples have encoded a vast array of symbolic meanings in these temples through architectural design and decorations. What is not evident is whether these meanings are decoded by users and if so, to what extent and how.

One other study on Chinese temples is that by Koh (1984/85) who dealt with three aspects of the Chinese temple: the physical (location and architectural symbolism); the functional (ownership, management, finance and staffing); and the sociological (that is, the worshippers in terms of their social profile, their reasons for visiting temples, and their perceptions of the temple as a sacred place in terms of the holiness of deities, absence of evil spirits and observance of codes of behaviour). The study used as its basis the concept of "perception" and through it, began to move towards understanding what values and meanings users have vested in their temples. Unfortunately, the study did not develop the theme fully, in large part because a primarily pre-coded questionnaire was used in the data collection and as I will argue in Chapter Four, issues of meanings and values are best explored through qualitative methods.

Studies of Hindu places of worship encompass a variety of perspectives. Some focus on specific temples: Rajah (1975/76) for example discussed the Munisvaran-Murugan Temple and the Muneeswaran Temple. He examined the personnel, iconography, and ritual activities performed at each of these temples to provide a descriptive ethnographic account. His study was a response to what he saw as a lack of comprehensive data about Hinduism in Singapore. In contrast to the focus on two temples, Mialeret's (1969) guide to Hindu temples in Singapore spreads the net wider and included brief histories and descriptions of temples dedicated to specific deities. Once again, the study was essentially descriptive and did not deal with any of the analytical themes which engage me.

On the other hand, three studies focusing on Hindu temples in Singapore come closer to some of my concerns with the symbolic significance of religious places. Kwang's (1982/83) study was written from an architectural perspective, concentrating on an exposition of Hindu temple architecture in Singapore. The study included analysis of building elements, such as the gopuram (tower) and the various mandapam (halls), the colours, as well as the orientation and plan form of temples. It was written in the style of Lip's (1978, 1981, 1983) studies of Chinese temples and like them, concentrated on the symbolic meanings of physical form as encoded by the producers of the religious buildings. While it is useful as a selective compilation of Hindu symbolism, it in no way considers the decoding of these symbols by temple users.

Sinha's (1987/88) study of Hinduism in Singapore took a sociological and ethnographic perspective, with one chapter given over particularly to "sacred space" in the form of home-altars, shrines and temples. She puts forward five ways in which temples can be classified (organisational and administrative framework; nature of

presiding deities; types of religious specialists; social and religious activities; and perceived ethno-linguistic differences). Further, she discussed the significance of temple worship in "Singaporean Hinduism", including the ranking of temples in terms of their perceived efficacy or power and the increasing importance of temple worship in Singapore. With regard to home altars, she provided an ethnographic account, including physical descriptions, a discussion of the role of women vis-a-vis home altars, religious practices at the home altar and the rules concerning home worship. She then compared temples, shrines and home altars and highlighted the differences in terms of the "access to deities" and the extent of bureaucratisation. Sinha's study is significant in that it recognised the importance of places of worship other than temples. At the same time, by focusing on the perceived efficacy of temples, she also introduced the perspective of the user, which tends to be ignored.

The only geographical study of Hindu temples in Singapore is by Sivapalan (1985/86) and it discussed locational factors, temple management, some aspects of the symbolism of temple architecture (such as orientation and plan) and temple worship, and devotees' perceptions of their temples as sacred places. Once again, her discussion of temple symbolism remained at the level of a selective examination of their religious content based on religious texts as invested by "producers". However, she did begin to suggest that symbolic meanings encoded by producers are seldom decoded by users. In her words, "this symbolism seems to have eluded a majority of the devotees." Her chapter dealing with the temple and the devotee examined inter alia how devotees perceive their temple to be sacred, the taboos involved in behaviour, and the place utility of temples in devotees' eyes. Sivapalan comes closest to examining the symbolic meanings of temples from the perspective of the people who use them, although methodologically the information was derived from a primarily pre-coded questionnaire survey which did not allow for an in-depth

exploration of meanings and values.

Apart from these studies which dealt exclusively with each religion, one notable study dealt comparatively with three groups and also dealt specifically with the symbolic meanings of places analytically. Although Chua (1988a) focused on house form rather than the explicitly religious place, he considered the religious meanings of dwellings in his discussion. He began with the premise that each of the major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) had developed its own house form in which the group's beliefs were encoded. When Singapore's housing and redevelopment programme was implemented, many people were moved from their ethnically specific house forms into standardised high-rise flats. Each group responded by inventing new ways, both spatial and symbolic behavioural to preserve the major elements of its own belief system. This is the only study to recognise that the state's public schemes of resettlement (the wider social-political scenario) form the larger context within which people adapt the meanings and values they attach to places. I will return to the work by Chua again in subsequent discussions of my empirical material.

To sum up, there are a variety of studies dealing with religious places in Singapore. A number of these are descriptive and serve as catalogues of temples. Of those which begin to treat the subject analytically, many are concerned with the architectural symbolism of these places, focusing on the religious content of symbols. Nothing has been said of the ideological content of religious places and indeed, with the exception of Chua (1988a), little notice is taken of the larger socio-political context in which meanings are formed and negotiated. Further, in focusing so closely on the architectural symbolism of religious buildings, researchers privilege the meanings encoded by producers while ignoring the meanings for the consumers. There is much

scope for a greater understanding of how a religious person relates to his/her religious place.

3.6 Urban development and land use planning in Singapore

While the preceding sections have concentrated on the social and religious character of Singapore's population, this section focuses on urban development and land use planning in the island-state. This is designed to provide the background for an understanding of planning guidelines pertaining to religious places which will be dealt with in Chapter Six. Specifically, in this section, I will provide a brief overview of the planning context in Singapore. I will begin with a statement of the guiding principles in land use planning. This will be illustrated in the context of urban renewal, with its emphasis on demolition and reconstruction and its relative neglect of conservation. The processes of decision-making and public participation in planning will then be considered, using land acquisition and resettlement as illustrations. The top-down approach to planning and decision-making will be emphasised and this will be cast within the wider context of the political culture in Singapore.

The Republic of Singapore consists of Singapore Island and about fifty eight islets within its territorial waters, together totalling only about 625 square kilometres. This small land area has had an important influence on Singapore's development in many ways.[22] Needless to say, it has had a profound influence on land use planning,

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[22] For example, it has guided population policies (in line with what the country can physically support at particular levels of acceptance). It has influenced tremendously the physical landscape in terms of housing design for instance. About 80% of the population live in high rise flats. It has also directed economic growth strategies away from land extensive programmes.

which has as its guiding principles "efficiency", "pragmatism" and "order". This is evident in the language typically used in planning and development circles. For example, in the Revised Master Plan, Report of Survey (1980:6), a typical statement reads: "(land) must be optimally used through long-term planning and orderly physical development". In another context, Lim et al. (1988:77) define land use policy as "... a set of guidelines and policies pertaining to the use of land so as to best achieve the twin objectives of allocative efficiency of scarce land resources and an equitable distribution of income".

These general principles are reflected in the way in which the state has gone about planning its land use. A clear example may be seen in the attitude towards urban renewal. For a long time, urban renewal in Singapore has meant demolition of the old and construction of the new. It is based on the view that renewal provides better employment and investment opportunities and improves living conditions, thus leading to physical, social and economic regeneration. These views reflect the modernist planning principles I discussed in Chapter Two. On the other hand, urban renewal need not only involve demolition and reconstruction. As Choe (1969a & b, 1975) pointed out, there are in fact three important elements of urban renewal, namely conservation, rehabilitation and rebuilding. Walter (1988:2-3) captured this well in his argument for a "holistic perspective" for urban renewal. For him, the renewal of a city is not merely physical reconstruction -- demolishing slums and replacing them with new buildings. Historically, the renewal of a city "was experienced as a mental and emotional transformation, an improvement of the spirit, a rebirth of psychic energies." Yet, in Singapore, conservation has only recently appeared on the agenda of urban planners. The implicit assumption was that conservation was antithetical to efficiency, orderliness and pragmatism. It is only recently that any comprehensive view regarding conservation has been attempted. The Conservation Master Plan was

announced as recently as December 1986 and the first stage of conservation of the Chinatown historic district through the restoration of 32 shophouses at Tanjong Pagar commenced in May 1987. The guidelines for the conservation of other historic districts (Little India and Kampong Glam) were only studied in 1987 (Ministry of National Development Annual Report, 1987:11) and released to the public in 1988.

Apart from the guiding principles in Singapore's urban planning, decision making and public participation are other pertinent issues in attempting to understand Singapore's planning context. Public participation is minimal and a "top-down" approach is taken to decision-making. The attitude is what Fonseca (1976:7) regarded as the "Master Plan attitude" where decision-makers treat public discussion on planning policy as "threats to a cherished vision" rather than "efforts at participation and a need for involvement." As Chen (1983:22) pointed out, "citizen participation" in Singapore implies participation at the stage of programme implementation rather than decision-formulation. In short, co-operation with the authorities who have pre-determined certain courses of action is expected. All this can be illustrated with reference to the way in which urban renewal is made possible.

In order for urban renewal, or more specifically, demolition and reconstruction to take place, the state has a variety of tools at its disposal. One is compulsory land acquisition and another is resettlement. A closer examination of each of these will illustrate the planning climate in Singapore. Compulsory land acquisition is the practice of expropriating private rights in land titles for public purposes. In Singapore, the government was empowered to acquire land for public purposes in 1854, although the first Land Acquisition Ordinance was enacted in 1920. After several amendments, the Land Acquisition Act of 1966, brought into operation in 1967, conferred upon the state tremendous power to acquire land through compulsory purchase (Yeung,

1973:38). The Minister for National Development can evoke the Act if a piece of private land is needed "for any public purpose; by any person, corporation or statutory board, for any work or undertaking which, in the opinion of the Minister, is of public benefit or of public utility or in the public interest; for any residential, commercial or industrial purposes" (Land Aquisition Act, 1985 ed.). Generally, acquisition has taken place to make way for public housing, industrial estates and urban renewal (Lim and Motha, 1980:163). Landowners affected are compensated monetarily though the amount awarded is much lower than market values (Lim et al., 1988:98). Owners also have no way of appealing against the decision to acquire their land, given that in section 5(3) of the Land Acquisition Act, the notification issued by the President is considered "conclusive evidence" of the land being needed for the purpose specified. The only Appeals Board that exists considers appeals in relation to the compensation award (Section 19, Land Acquisition Act, 1985 ed.). This is one example of planning from above, with minimal channels for public participation and negotiation.

Resettlement is another example. Since 1959, resettlement has been an integral part of almost every public project in Singapore. Principally, resettlement is aimed at eradicating slums and freeing the land for public projects, as well as providing slum dwellers in squalid conditions with a better standard of housing. The resettlement policy includes the provision of alternative accommodation for those affected and payment for the loss of assets on the lands. While the precise compensation rates have varied over the years, they have nevertheless reflected these two guiding tenets (Lim and Lim, 1985).

As in the case of compulsory land acquisition, those affected have little recourse to negotiation channels. Decisions are made at high levels and imposed on the

population. Occasionally, some efforts may be made to soften the impact. Resettlement officers may approach those affected in order to identify their problems and needs, particularly in relation to the housing estates they will move to, and in terms of compensation benefits. However, it is not the same as involving the population before decisions about relocation are made or discussing the options with those who will be affected. Indeed, when people are targetted for resettlement, there is no formal channel through which they can make their representations against the decision. The only actions individuals/groups may take is to appeal to their Members of Parliament for help. However, MPs can, at best, only assist by obtaining suitable alternative accommodation (or locations in the case of shopkeepers) or setting in motion appeals for better compensation. The relocation decision is not reversed.

This situation reflects the wider political scenario in which public participation in general policy making has been limited. Chan (1975:55), in terming Singapore an administrative state, described it as one which "believes that time spent by groups and counter-groups to lobby, influence and change policy outcomes are a waste of time that detract from the swift implementation of the plan and programme." Her argument that participation is allowed only if it is directed through "approved channels" echoes Cockburn's (1977) view that public participation in planning in Britain during the 1960s was permissible only if the terms of participation were dictated by the authorities. In the context of Singapore, approved channels may be grouped roughly into two categories: those which allow public attempts to shape and influence decisions (for example, the Feedback Unit,[23] Government Parliamentary

[23] The Feedback Unit formed in 1985 is headed by a government MP, Mr Chandra Das and invites comments and suggestions from the general public on government policies.

Committees,[24] and interest groups[25]); and those which participate by mobilising support for decided causes (for example, Citizens' Consultative Committees, Community Centre Management Committees, and Residents' Committees[26]). Groups like the Feedback Unit and Government Parliamentary Committees represent a tardy recognition by the government that an increasingly better educated population demands a more active voice in decision-making. Without that voice, frustration and alienation would increase. Finally, Chan (1975:56-7) identified another approved channel of political participation -- the articulation of views and ideas and the application of pressure on government agencies through the letter columns of newspapers. She argued that such an avenue of expression is acceptable in the administrative state because there is no organisation and action behind it: more often than not, letters represent the views of isolated and unco-ordinated individuals. As such, it is thought that little disruptive action can come out of it -- letter-writing is a positive way to "let off steam".

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[24] The Government Parliamentary Committees (GPCs) allow participation in a very select and elite manner. Formed in 1986, these ten committees (for example, on Defence and Foreign Affairs, Education, Environment, Health and so forth) are intended to act variously as the Government's watchdog, a sounding board for policies, a feedback channel from the ground, as well as resource panels for the government, drawing from the expertise of the members. Each is headed by a government MP and consists of government backbenchers and invited representatives from the public. These representatives generally represent part of the "power elite" of the country, which consists of the political elite, the bureaucracy, and the select professional elite.

[25] Interest groups, in the broadest sense of the term, range from professional associations (such as the Law Society) and "commercial" associations (such as the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce), to Chinese clan associations (for example, the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan) and environmental groups (the Singapore branch of the Malayan Nature Society) (see Gamer, 1969). Most have generally kept low profiles.

[26] Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs), Community Centre Management Committees (CCMCs) and Residents' Committees (RCs) are groups of volunteers who look after the general welfare of people in each constituency. Where participation is concerned, they promote national campaigns or constituency projects that reflect pre-determined national goals. Insofar as making recommendations to the government is concerned, they go only as far as making recommendations concerning matters such as the provision of bus services or other physical facilities to meet the citizens' needs (Wong and Yeh, 1985:304).

In brief, the political culture in Singapore is such that public participation is kept to a minimum and decisions are made at top levels. Only in recent years has there been a greater attempt on the part of the population to make their opinions heard and to seek a role in decision-making. Only in recent years, too, has there been a greater openness on the part of the government and an expressed committment to engage in a more consultative style of government. Perhaps with this shift in political culture, there may be concomitant changes in the style of urban planning and decision-making.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a background to my empirical study. Socially and culturally, I have highlighted the heterogeneity of Singapore. This heterogeneity extends to the religious setting where the diverse groups include an entire spectrum from religions of the text, to religions of the text mixed with elements of local influence, to entirely syncretic non-formalised religions. Through my descriptions of the various groups, I have illustrated how the character of religions is mediated through the particularities of place. Hence, in Singapore, Islam is mixed with keramat worship and "Chinese religion" is best characterised by "shenism".

I have provided an introduction to the literature pertaining to Singapore's religious places and highlighted the neglect of users' meanings and values for these places in section 3.4. By focusing on the architectural symbolism of religious buildings, there has also been a failure to address symbolism at another level -- the ideological level. Indeed, little consideration is given to the socio-political context in which meanings are formed and negotiated.

In the last section, I focused especially on the urban planning context in Singapore, highlighting two aspects in particular. The first is the modernist approach to planning in which there is a tendency to emphasise "pragmatism", "efficiency" and "orderliness" at the expense of other values. In the neglect of conservation for example, historical meaning and architectural value were ignored. The second is the long-established tendency to adopt a top-down approach in decision-making which does not involve the people most affected by the decisions. This is reflective of the wider political culture in Singapore.

Having thus presented this contextual material, the next four chapters will focus specifically on my empirical study. Chapter Four will deal with the "how" of the empirical work, including the theoretical issues underlying the choice of methodology as well as the practicalities of carrying out the research. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven will then discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain the ways in which I set about achieving my research objectives through a field study. Fundamentally, I began by recognising that the study requires information of different types; and as Trow argued, "different kinds of information about man (sic) and society are gathered most fully and economically in different ways" (quoted in Eyles, 1986:16). On the basis of this maxim, the strategy I developed comprised a combination of methods. What follows in this chapter is first, a description of the different types of information demanded by the study (section 4.2), followed by an overview of the methods that I considered, and justification of the choice of each eventual option (section 4.3). Section 4.4 is a brief summation of the multiple strategy employed in this research. The final sections (4.5 to 4.8) will then focus on how the strategy was carried out and the problems I encountered in the process.

4.2 Information requirements

Three categories of information are required to achieve the study objectives. At one level, information would be needed on the symbolic meanings of religious places for "ordinary" individuals. The sort of information required would include, for example, questions about how and why religious places may be significant for individuals. Are "religious" places also "sacred" places? Indeed, what is the individual's notion of "sacredness" and what constitutes a "sacred place"? Does the individual

distinguish the sacred from the secular, and if so, how? Are religious places centres of meaning, significance and value; do they evoke in individuals a sense of place? Such information is by nature sensitive and very personal.

However, before delving into these deeper levels of intangible meanings and values, it is necessary to have some idea of how people relate to their religious places at a more straightforward, manifest level. Hence, a second category of information required would be broad-based and extensive, providing a picture of how people use religious places. This would include establishing patterns of worship for the different religious groups in terms of where they pray, how often, for how long, and so forth. It also includes establishing what people usually do at their places of worship, and (with an eye on the relationships between different groups in a multi-religious setting) the extent to which they have contact with religious places of other groups. This involves establishing, for example, if individuals have been to other places of worship and if so, the reasons for such visits. Additionally, to understand the place of religion in Singapore society, I would need to establish the importance and relevance of religion in the lives of people. Finally, I would want to establish how these various patterns may vary with different religions, age, sex and class groups. Such information, gathered at an aggregate level, would provide an indication of some of the broad trends in religious activities in Singapore.

At a third level, information on the role of the state in religious affairs would be required. I therefore needed to research existing state policies pertaining to religious issues in general and as they affect religious landscapes in particular. It would then be possible to derive an interpretation of how the state conceptualises what constitutes "sacred places"; the symbolic meanings of these places for the state; and how the state then translates its concept of sacred places in landscape and spatial terms.

4.3 Options

With these requirements in mind, I turned for ideas of potential methods to other studies which have dealt with similar issues. As I showed in Chapter Two, there are few empirical studies which can help me. Within geography, most of the relevant research has tended to use historical sources. For example, Harvey's (1979) study of Sacre Couer, Lewandowski's (1984) analysis of Madras, and Duncan's (1985, 1990) treatment of Kandy all adopt historical material as their sources of information. By contrast, mine is an empirical study concerned with meanings and values in a dynamic setting. Such meanings are contemporary and are to be drawn from people now living in their existential environments and engaged in a constant process of interaction with their religious places. The above studies therefore offer little by way of methodological possibilities in my exploration of contemporary meanings and values.

On the other hand, I am aware of two empirical studies which focus specifically on Singapore's religious places. These are Koh's (1984/85) study of Chinese temples and Sivapalan's (1985/86) study of Hindu temples, both of which I have discussed briefly in Chapter Three. The primary source of data in both studies was a questionnaire survey, comprising mainly closed questions. While these were useful in establishing basic patterns of worship amongst devotees, surveys become deficient in identifying and understanding the deeper level of how people felt about their religious places. For instance, when exploring the sense of "sacredness", Koh (1984/85:97) employed mainly closed questions with "Yes/No" categories for respondents to tick off on the questionnaire. As an illustration, respondents were asked if they considered the temple sacred, and if so, what things they specifically considered sacred. They were also asked if they thought evil spirits could be found

in the temple and if they knew of taboos which must be observed in the temples. Arguably, these methods may have been suitable in the context of her study.[1] They may indeed be useful as preliminary and exploratory questions in my context, providing a feel of the larger picture; but when a deeper and fuller understanding of human relationships with religious places is desired, then questionnaires do not offer the depth and subtlety required. Given such limitations, I therefore began to look for alternatives.

I began with the assumption that different levels of information require different methods and so weighed the options in turn for each of the levels. At one level, I would require an extensive data base, providing a broad aggregate picture of the trends pertaining to people's attitudes to religion and their participation in religious activities at various religious places. While this would be primarily descriptive, it could also provide some general idea of why these trends exist. Given these requirements, a questionnaire survey consisting mainly of closed questions and a limited number of open-ended questions would be most appropriate.

In terms of collecting information about state policies pertaining to religion and the religious landscapes in Singapore, there were a number of possibilities. The official stand on religion and the policies which affect the religious landscape (for example, policies pertaining to land use for religious purposes) are documented, albeit diffusely, in both primary sources (official documents) and secondary material. The obvious way to collate such information is through archival research. However, the rationale behind some of the policies is often not revealed through such material. Clearly, it would not be possible for me to be privy to the actual policy-making

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[1] Both Koh's (1984/85) and Sivapalan's (1985/86) studies were carried out under time and other constraints typical of undergraduate theses.

process, which often occurs at Cabinet level. Therefore, besides gleaning what I can from documentary sources, I decided to interview decision-makers in the government. Apart from clarifying state policies and the underlying rationale, these interviews would also provide opportunities to present insights and feelings at ground level to the decision-makers and those with the power to effect changes. It would then be possible to gauge the reactions of those in power to the feelings and values of "ordinary" individuals for religious places.

Finally, I was confronted with a variety of options when it came to collecting information about more deeply held meanings and values. If I were to use quantitative methods, my questionnaire survey could be expanded to include questions aimed at eliciting information on symbolic meanings and values. It would thus become the chief data source for the study. However, it seemed obvious that issues of concern at this level were likely to touch on people's emotions. For instance, talking about attachments to places and feelings about religious issues could be an intensely emotional personal experience; and dealing with feelings about state policies towards religion could be highly sensitive. The survey method is ill-suited for such a task. As Walker (1985:3) pointed out, social surveys are inappropriate if the topic is sensitive because such surveys are likely to "elicit only superficial responses". Furthermore, exploring attachments and attitudes would require a detailed and intensive understanding of individuals, including an understanding of their religious background, their commitment to religion and their motivations. The context of people's lives, in other words, should be a part of the information collected so that their views are not divorced from the meanings in which they were originally situated (Cornwell, 1988:183). Again, the standard social survey, even with open-ended questions, would not allow for such in-depth probing. What is needed is a technique that would allow me to get beyond the fleeting, superficial contact of formal

interviews.[2] The technique should also allow people's views and opinions to be expressed in their own terms, rather than be structured by the preconceived notions of the researcher.

Qualitative and interpretative methods seemed promising. The merits of these methods in selected research situations have been dealt with at length elsewhere by both geographers and non-geographers (see for example, Eyles and Smith, 1988; and Walker, 1985). As Walker (1985:21) pointed out, qualitative research is appropriate when the topic is sensitive and complicated, and when the phenomenon is not measurable. It is also appropriate when one is concerned with the "understanding of meanings in specific contexts" (Eyles, 1988b:2), and with capturing the "wholeness" of an individual (Donovan, 1988:192) in the words of the people themselves. For these reasons, qualitative methods seemed appropriate for collecting information on the symbolic meanings and values of religious places. I therefore explored the theory and practice of qualitative research in greater detail.

Although there are different qualitative research methods which vary in precise detail and have different conceptual derivations, the basic theoretical arguments underpinning all of these methods are the same. Qualitative research posits a certain relationship between researcher and subject which differs from that in the positivistic tradition. In the latter, the researcher is an outsider; the subject is the insider. The gulf is not bridged. On the other hand, in qualitative research, the emphasis is on an

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[2] Moser and Kalton (1971) classified interviews into two types: formal and informal. In the former, questions are asked in standardised form and sequence, with the researcher following a standardised questionnaire schedule. As Eyles (1986:12) pointed out, these tend to be useful for eliciting information of a routine nature. In informal interviewing, on the other hand, the precise questions asked and their order are not decided beforehand. The interviewer engages the respondent in a "conversation" and the appropriate question styles and order emerge as the interview progresses.

empathetic understanding of people, on intersubjectivity, that is, the understanding that individuals have of each other, and the interactions and shared meanings between them. The researcher engages in this process of understanding the individual, in as much as the individual is engaged in a process of understanding the researcher. The idea is very much akin to Weber's (1949) concept of verstehen -- "living the life of the other". Also similar is Rowles' (1978:174-175) use of the notion of "interpersonal knowing" which mediates between "objective knowing" and "subjective knowing". These are three possible levels of relationships between the researcher and the subject. For example, the researcher can know and understand the geographical experience of a person "objectively" and in a highly abstracted manner, using the methods of positivism. Hence, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a concern with developing mental maps and activity spaces. Often though, the richness of environmental experience is lost when such methods of knowing are employed. By contrast, the geographical experience of a person may be known "subjectively" and implicitly. In such a situation, no one else goes through the experience in exactly the same way as the person experiencing the environment. The problem with both these ways of knowing is that objective knowing is often overly abstracted while subjective knowing is ultimately inaccessible. However, interpersonal knowing straddles these two extremes and approximates the concept of intersubjectivity. In such a situation, the researcher empathises with the subjects, feels with them, identifies with them although he/she cannot be them. Doing qualitative research fundamentally involves developing this sense of interpersonal knowing and allows for some transcendence of the epistemological gulf between "insider" and "outsider". This links back to the established method of anthropologists -- ethnography -- in which the emphasis is similarly on understanding the "participants' view" (Hannerz, 1980:21).

To achieve an empathetic understanding of the other, the researcher must

engage in a social process, interacting constantly with the subject. Precisely because the process is social and unique in each situation, it leads to a "relativistic interpretation of the knowledge" uncovered (Walker, 1985:13). It is relative because it is the researcher's interpretation of the information, but it is also relative because the information which the researcher obtains is already an interpretation of the situation by the informant. This is akin to Geertz's (1973:9) use of Ryle's concept of "thick description": "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to". This "double hermeneutic" (Giddens, 1976:79) is, according to Geertz (1973:9), inevitable because "right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications." At the end of the day, the researcher hopes to grasp the meanings constituted by the actors themselves and then reconstructs these meanings within new frameworks that follow his/her own conceptual schemes (Giddens, 1976:79). Thus, while qualitative research may transcend the gulf between "insider" and "outsider", it is also necessary to be aware that "insiders" themselves already have subjective, "folk definitions of the situation" which researchers seek to empathise with and understand, with the aim of reconstructing their own "academic" definitions of the situation (Jackson, 1980).

Considering the nature of qualitative methods -- in-depth, intensive, and detailed -- adopting them almost necessarily implies working with small numbers of people. Whether it is in-depth interviews, group interviews, or participant-observation, a small number of case studies are often selected for study. Because of these small numbers, the case study method has been questioned on the grounds of representativeness and replicability. Although case studies have long been part of social research, the method was discredited in social science circles during the quantitative revolution which introduced sampling techniques based on probability

theory and statistical analysis. The criterion of validation for quantitative geography has also come to be imposed in other contexts, often inappropriately, as reflected in the chief criticism leveled against the use of case studies: if the researcher uses only a small number of case studies, how does he/she know that the case chosen for study is typical? In other words, if the case is not representative of the parent population, is it valid?

In fact, case studies can be defended on two grounds: first in terms of sampling, and second, in terms of making inferences. On the one hand, quantitative geography requires that the sample selected reflects accurately the characteristics of the parent population and that a sufficient number be selected so that statistically, we are confident of representativeness. This is statistical sampling. On the other hand, in a case study, theoretical sampling rather than statistical sampling is used (Mitchell, 1983). In other words, the researcher can do two things. The first is to sample theoretically to find crucial cases that would invalidate a theory. The second is to select cases to reflect some general theoretical principle, in which case the claim to validity then "depends entirely on demonstrating that the features he (sic) portrays in the case are representative not of a population but of this general principle" (Silverman, 1985:113).

In terms of making valid inferences, Mitchell (1983:188) argued that the ways in which inferences are made from statistical data are different from the ways in which inferences are made from cases. The problem arises when it is assumed that the only valid basis of inference is that which has been developed in relation to statistical analysis. On the one hand, as Mitchell (1983) and others (for example, Silverman, 1985:114) have argued, statistical analysis "reveals correlations not causes". If for instance, a relationship is observed (statistically) in a sample between age and the probability of being married, the inference that can be made from the sample is

simply that there is a correlation between the two. To go beyond the correlation, the researcher needs to use theory or logic to impute a causal relationship between the variables. This is the process known variously as scientific, causal or logical inference. Therefore, as Mitchell (1983:197) pointed out, "the inference about the logical relationship between the two characteristics is not based upon the representativeness of the sample and therefore upon its typicality, but rather upon the plausibility or upon the logicality of the nexus between the two characteristics." On the other hand, when using case studies, the researcher extrapolates from case studies to like situations only by logical inference. The claim that the features present in a case study will be related in a wider population is not a claim to representativeness but to faultless logic (Mitchell, 1983:200; Silverman, 1985:114).

While the preceding discussions provide the theoretical basis for the use of qualitative methods, the question left unanswered is which particular technique should be adopted. Geographers using qualitative methods have adopted the participant-observation techniques of ethnographers (Jackson, 1980, 1983), in-depth interviews used by oral historians and sociologists (Rowles, 1978, 1983; Cornwell, 1984) and to a limited extent, group interviews in which groups either meet once (Kitching, 1990) or over several sessions (Burgess et al., 1988a, b, & c; 1990). For my purposes, depth interviewing with individuals, single-session and multiple-session groups were three possible options. A decision had to be made as to which of these three would be the most appropriate.

Group interviews, whether single or multiple sessions, are enormously valuable because they provide a much-needed method for exploring in an empirical way people's values about issues and places. By recreating in a sense a social context where people talk to one another in their own words and in their own ways, it is

possible to capture some of the multifaceted and contextual nature of individual and collective experience (Burgess et al., 1988a:324). However, group methods pose some problems.

In the case of groups which meet only once, there is little opportunity for interpersonal relationships between group members to develop. This is particularly problematic in my context because the nature of my subject requires that people talk openly and freely about matters which are extremely private and personal, sensitive and intimate. It is unlikely that any person meeting a group of six or seven other people for the first and last time, for about an hour and a half, will begin to be totally frank and open about their deep-seated personal feelings regarding religion. Without trust and intimacy, people are likely to react with superficial impressions and attitudes and to trot out what they think are acceptable and expected of them, that is, "public accounts"[3] (Burgess, 1982:109; Cornwell, 1984; Burgess et al., 1988a:311). They are likely to feel constrained about what they say in front of others and to "tidy up" the pictures of themselves which they present to the world (Hedges, 1985:74). For example, given that weekly congregational worship is obligatory for Christians and Muslims, those who do not follow this faithfully may feel compelled to state otherwise so that they will not be seen to be lapsing. This problem of superficiality was encountered in one of the few academic studies that have actually used single group sessions. In his study of landscape values, Little (1975:53) conducted three "forums" with approximately twelve participants each to "get behind the rhetoric of land use planning to a basic understanding of how Americans really feel about their land and

[3] "Public accounts" are "sets of meanings in common social currency that reproduce and legitimate the assumptions people take for granted about the nature of social reality" (Cornwell, 1984:15). On the other hand, "private accounts" "spring directly from personal experience and from the thoughts and feelings accompanying it" (Cornwell, 1984:16).

landscape". As he freely acknowledged, the responses were "predictable" and have since been criticised for "superficiality" (Burgess et al., 1990:147).

Since there is often no rapport amongst members of a single session group, some may argue that a pre-existing group, such as a family or members of a religious organisation, could be used. In this case, participants would already know one another and there would be no need for the initial "ice-breaking". However, I rejected that possibility on the grounds that "groups of this kind have pre-existing group structures and dynamics of their own, and may be inhibited by the fact that they have to go on functioning as a group after you have gone" (Walker, 1985:76). As Walker suggested, they should be avoided unless there is need to interview the group as a unit. Kitching's (1990) study of the immobility of the low-skilled and unemployed in the United Kingdom illustrated the advantages and problems of using pre-existing groups. On the one hand, he avoided the problem of superficiality to some extent because pre-existing groups -- Jobclubs[4] -- were used. These Jobclubs were not formed by the researcher, and had a life of their own outside the research process. Indeed, part of the objectives of the Jobclub training programme was to build a group identity. By the time the researcher conducted the discussion on mobility issues (usually after the third session of the Jobclub programme), a certain familiarity, if not understanding, had already developed amongst group members. Superficiality was therefore avoided to some extent. However, Kitching faced a problem with using such pre-existing groups. Interpersonal relationships which had developed during the life of the group were a mystery to the researcher and this sometimes posed problems in the interpretation of the discussion.

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[4] Jobclubs are groups formed by Job Centres whereby members are coached in useful skills, such as telephone manner, interview performance, as well as how to write letters and CVs. In turn, members commit themselves to attending every session of the Club (Kitching, 1990:164).

Another potential problem arises from having mixed gender groups. While having such mixed groups would, in fact, suit my purposes of comparing the experiences and meanings of religious places between males and females, there was a strong likelihood of the discussion becoming uneven, with males dominating (see for example, Thorne and Henley, 1975). The problem may be compounded in the case of Muslims, for example. Many still believe that Friday prayer sessions at the mosque are for men only (despite a recent introduction of females' galleries in new-generation mosques in Singapore). Furthermore, inherent in the religion is a male bias in that all those in a position to lead (for example, as imam) must be males. Hence, it is likely that in any discussion involving males and females, the former are likely to dominate. In the case of the Chinese religionists, the problem may be reversed. Temple worship is perceived to be "women's business" (Elliott, 1955:165; Koh, 1984/85:47), and it could be difficult to recruit males to engage in group discussions, though they might be more willing to talk on an individual basis.[5]

For these reasons, I rejected the use of group interviews and began to explore the possibilities of in-depth interviews with individuals -- a method popular with some qualitative geographers. For example, Cornwell (1984), in a study of health and illness in East London, interviewed twenty four individuals about their common-sense ideas and theories about health, illness, and health services. The interviews were constructed around a schedule of topics, including some standard questions which were put to

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[5] Some of these problems I have discussed would be likely to remain even if multiple-session groups were convened although trust and intimacy could develop between members if the groups had a relatively longer life. However, there is a danger when members of a group begin to know one another that the groups could become overtly therapeutic (Burgess et al., 1988a, b & c). This would seem to be a real possibility when the discussion topic is something as personal as religion. To conduct such groups would require considerable group leadership skills which I do not possess, and for that reason, I decided against the use of multiple-session groups in my eventual choice of method.

everyone as well as questions developed specifically for each individual which made use of information from earlier interviews with them and with other people. Such in-depth interviews are valuable for they permit a high level of detail and thoroughness, and allow the researcher to get to know people in the study individually (Cornwell, 1984:2). With regard to the issue of people sharing their very private and intimate thoughts and feelings about religion, interviews on an individual basis mean that developing trust and understanding is a matter between interviewer and interviewee only. This is opposed to a group situation where developing such trust is a multiple problem because the rapport has to be built up between the researcher and each member of the group, as well as between the various members of the group. For these reasons, I decided on the use of in-depth interviews with individuals as one of my research methods.

However, in-depth interviews are not without problems, as Cornwell (1984) pointed out. First, there is a danger of treating people as objects in order to get what one wants out of them. That is unethical, manipulative, and unproductive. Once people begin to feel they are being used, it is unlikely that they will agree to spend hours of their time, introduce relatives and friends, and share their thoughts. It is therefore important to let people direct the course of the interview and to follow their interest in the topics that the researcher may propose. Second, differences in sex between the researcher and the interviewee may pose problems. Cornwell found she related more easily to female interviewees while males had difficulty knowing how to talk to her: "they did not know whether or not to swear or tell jokes and also had very little idea what to say about personal matters" (Cornwell, 1984:13). A similar problem arises because of differences in social class and educational background between researcher and interviewee. Often, Cornwell found that interviewees would provide polite responses to questions asked by someone they hardly knew. This, she

felt, was an indication of the good manners that conventionally mark social distance, and is in fact akin to Goffman's (1959) idea of "impression management". Cornwell (1984:11-17) discussed this problem in terms of public accounts as opposed to private accounts. The way to get beyond superficial public accounts is to develop a good rapport with interviewees so that they feel comfortable to talk more freely and genuinely. This in turn requires time and a good technique which help the interviewee feel at ease.

Rowles (1978, 1983) in his exploration of the geographical experience of old persons similarly employed depth interviews, which he characterised as "conversations in their homes, at local bars, at community meetings" (Rowles, 1978:173). In addition, Rowles also shared in individuals' everyday life experiences by going on shopping trips, taking local walks, and visiting friends with them. By thus engaging in the lives of the respondents, Rowles hoped to establish an authentic relationship with them. His method enabled him to know his respondents intimately and individually, within the whole context of their lives. He could deal with emotional and sensitive issues not only as a researcher but as a friend. This however is a two-edged sword, as Rowles found. He faced a "personal dilemma of involvement" when he found it "increasingly difficult to pull back from the experience, to think critically and to interpret" (Rowles, 1978:185). Fundamentally, it was a dilemma of how to keep a level of commitment which would encourage participants to reveal themselves without getting so intensely involved that one is unable to translate and communicate these insights to an academic community. Similarly, the process of termination could also pose a problem in such research situations given the depth of the relationships developed. There is no "how-to" manual to guide researchers seeking the balance between involvement and pulling back. Neither is there a set way in which the research process can be terminated. Each researcher must learn to establish the appropriate relationship in each

situation with each participant.

Rowles (1978:177) also highlighted two other problems in relation to doing experiential field work. One is the problem of enlisting participants. Asking people to make a fairly long-term commitment to reveal themselves to a stranger whose intentions are not totally comprehensible is difficult. The problem was more acute in his case because his fieldwork involved the participants in sharing their lives and doing things with him rather than just talking to him. If the research involved only in-depth interviews, the problem would probably still exist but in a less severe form. Arising from the difficulty of enlisting participants, researchers may be tempted to recruit using a "veiled promise": "If you cooperate, I can improve your situation". This is unethical and exploitative and must be avoided.

In sum, in-depth interviews allow researchers to understand more closely the wholeness of individuals' lives in a detailed manner and for this reason, are appropriate for understanding the meanings and values people invest in their religious places. There are problems of recruitment, ethics, intensity of relationship and the possibility of over-structuring interviews but they are not insurmountable. Often, it is a question of adopting an attitude of honesty and of developing a comfortable style of interviewing which is sympathetic and yet professional. Barriers of class, race, education, sex and age will inevitably exist but they also occur in other research situations where different methods are used. The only realistic way to deal with such barriers is with patience so that a common language and comfortable relationship evolves. Thus weighing the benefits and problems, I decided that in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate technique to adopt in order to understand the meanings and values of religious places for people.

4.4 Eventual strategy: Methodological triangulation

Having established the different types of information required and the optional methods through which they can be obtained, I settled on a multiple strategy involving different methods which, far from conflicting, were complementary. As Walker (1985:16) pointed out, "different methods can ... complement each other as when a survey provides a context for qualitative work which in turn permits commentary on the findings of the survey." Such indeed was the experience in my study. In other words, by practising methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970), information collected in one way could complement and confirm information collected in another.

To sum up, the eventual strategy employed was a multiple one, consisting of four parts (Table 4.1). The first comprises a questionnaire survey to gather an extensive data base of selected religious patterns in Singapore. The second involves in-depth interviews with individuals sampled theoretically rather than statistically, focusing on issues such as the symbolic meanings of religious places. The third consists of archival research to collate information on state policies pertaining to religion, while the fourth includes interviews with decision-makers and government officials to further understand the rationale for state policies. Having decided on the strategy, the specific field tactics were then worked out. Fieldwork was conducted during two trips to Singapore. The first lasted five months between April and September 1989, during which I carried out the survey, conducted the in-depth interviews and completed some of the archival research. I then returned to London for some preliminary analysis of the material before embarking on the second trip which lasted three months between January and April 1990. During this second trip, I completed all the archival research and interviewed civil servants and a politician.

Table 4.1: Research strategy -- a case of methodological triangulation

Aims	Information Requirements	Method
1. Establishing patterns of worship	Broad-based, extensive	Social survey
2. Understanding meanings and values of religious places for individuals	Personal, detailed, in-depth, potentially sensitive	Depth interviews with individuals
3. Establishing state conceptions of religion and religious space and place	Official state views and policies; and rationale for policies	Official documents; transcripts of speeches and interviews by elected state representatives; newspaper reports Interviews with state officials

The next sections will focus particularly on the broad mechanics of fieldwork and the problems I encountered.

4.5 The questionnaire survey

The broad aims of the social survey have been outlined above and I now turn to the three specific aims of the questionnaire. The first is to establish the broad patterns of worship among the different religious groups in Singapore, focusing on:

a) institutionalised public places of worship (temples, churches and mosques), with respect to several specific aspects: spatial, temporal, and social;

b) other public places such as schools, work places, roadside shrines and so forth; and

c) private places, namely the house, in both spatial and temporal terms.

The second aim is to establish patterns of inter-religious "mixing" in Singapore by exploring the extent to which devotees of one religion visit other religious places and their reasons for so doing. Third, a preliminary attempt will be made to establish the importance and relevance of religion in the lives of Singaporeans.

Once the aims were clear, I drew up a questionnaire (Appendices A1 and A2), with slight variations for Chinese religionists and Hindus to take into account my observation that some of them tended to go to more than one temple regularly. The testing was done with 30 individuals from various religious groups at a Clementi community centre. After the pilot survey and a few revisions, it was ready for administration. It was necessary to decide between a house-to-house survey or to select particular places of worship for each religious group at which to administer the

questionnaires. Two factors worked against the religious site. First and most important was the likelihood of an inherent bias in potential respondents at the religious site. These would be the people who are more likely to go frequently to these public places of worship. Focusing on the religious site would diminish the chances of including the people for whom the private place of worship (house) may be significant. By the same token, the chief advantage of doing a house-to-house survey is that it is more likely to reach respondents who may not go to the church, temple or mosque very often, if at all, but for whom the house or other places of worship may be significant. This would provide an avenue for understanding the role of places of worship other than churches, temples and mosques. A second problem is the choice of specific religious buildings in which to survey. This is a particular problem in the case of Chinese and Hindu temples which are usually dedicated to a particular deity or deities. Many devotees visit temples on the basis of which deity they pray to and so patterns of behaviour observed at a specific site would likely be confined to that particular temple. A house-to-house survey would eliminate this problem by providing a more general picture.

Having decided on a house-to-house survey, a second decision was whether to do a country-wide survey or to conduct the research within a smaller geographical area. The latter seemed more sensible in the light of time and financial constraints. Hence, I chose to close off the field to more manageable proportions by delineating it in spatial terms. Singapore contains a number of new towns which contribute to the spatial and social organisation of the country. There are seventeen new towns[6] in various stages of completion, and I decided to work in one. My choice was based on

[6] These are Queenstown, Toa Payoh, Telok Blangah, Woodlands, Bedok, Ang Mo Kio, Clementi, Yishun, Hougang, Jurong (East and West), Tampines, Bukit Batok, Bishan, Serangoon, Chua Chu Kang and Bukit Panjang.

several criteria. First, the population profile in the new town should reflect the national population profile as closely as possible, for example, in terms of age structure, ethnic composition, mean household size, socio-economic status (reflected in the types of housing) and so forth. Second, the new town should be relatively established so that people have more or less settled schedules and routines; where no recent upheavals in place of residence have occurred as in the case of a very newly established new town. Third, there should be a private housing estate in close proximity to the predominant housing scheme so that the upper and upper middle classes can also be included in the survey. Based on these various criteria, Clementi New Town and the surrounding estates were chosen (Figure 4.1 and Plates 4.1 and 4.2) (see Appendix B for a description of the study area).

A third major set of decisions had to do with the sample. How big was it to be and how was it to be chosen and stratified? As far as sample size was concerned, it was clearly impossible to attempt the standard five or even three per cent of the population in Clementi, which numbered over 100,000. I decided to conduct 500 interviews as that sample size would still leave respectable numbers within each religious category if the sample were to be divided along religious lines. The electoral register provided the sampling frame and the sample was stratified to reflect the proportions of different religious and socio-economic groups at the national level. Care was also taken to include as far as possible an equal number of both male and female respondents. Using these broad guidelines, a random sample was picked, totalling 500. The precise breakdown reflecting the stratification is described in Appendix B. The procedures involved in conducting the actual fieldwork can also be found in Appendix B, including details of the sampling procedure, the preparation of the field, recruiting and training field workers, fieldwork management, debriefing and data processing.

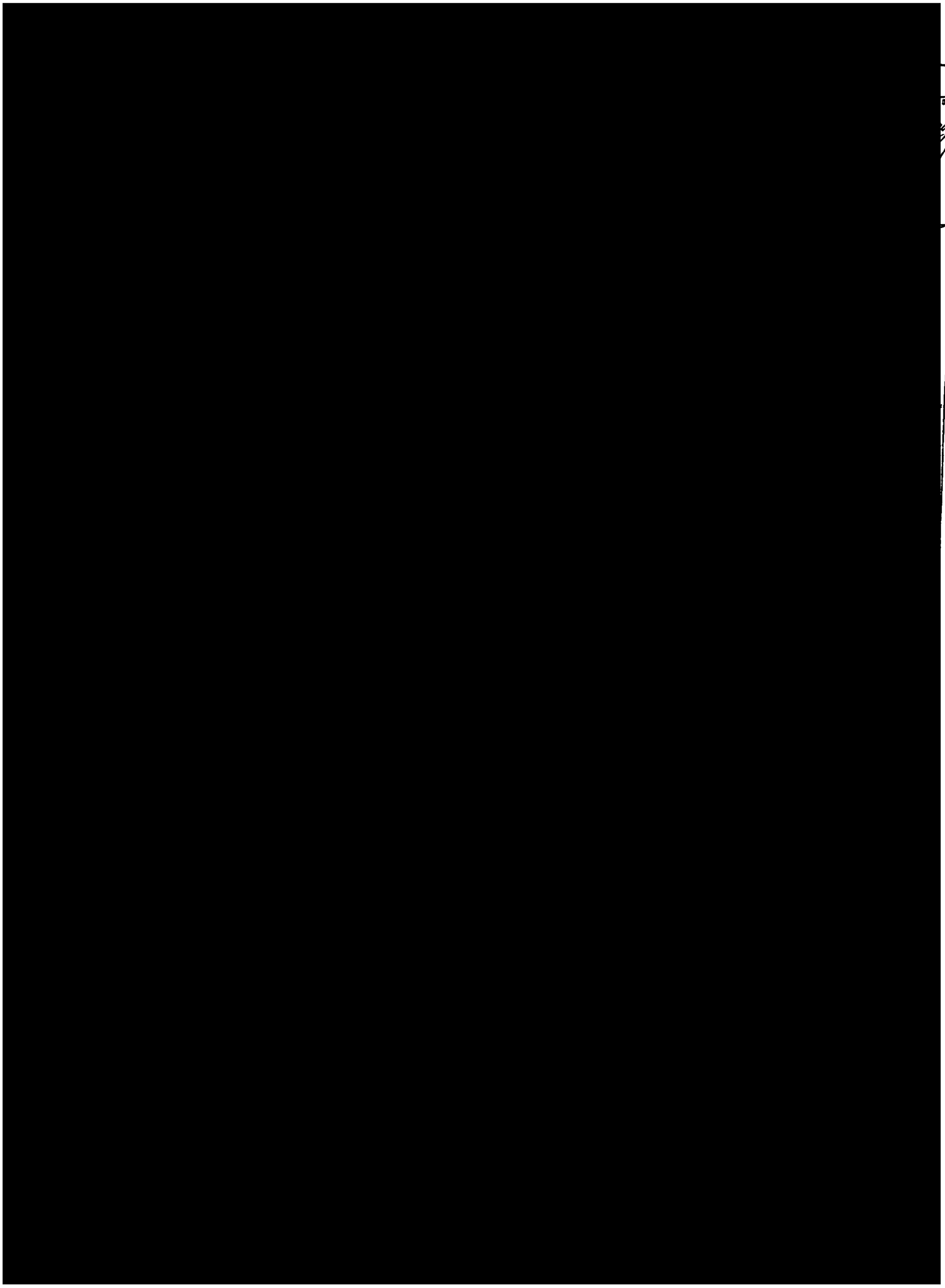

Figure 4.1: The study area

Plate 4.1 HDB flats at Clementi

Plate 4.2 HUDC flats at Pine Grove

Doing the field work was not too difficiult and there were not many problems. There were sometimes language barriers because I could not speak Malay or an Indian dialect and some willing respondents (particularly the older ones) could not speak the languages I was proficient in (namely English, Mandarin and a number of Chinese dialects). However, this was solved because I always had an interpreter with me. Second, some of the interviewers I recruited were concerned about wandering down empty corridors and entering strange houses. I therefore arranged for interviewers to work in pairs which allayed their fears to a large extent. Although I anticipated that the greatest problem would be a resistance to participating because the survey was to do with religions, this did not prove so. The response rate was 70%, higher than I anticipated (see Appendix B, Section J on Fieldwork Results). This is not to say that there was no suspicion and resistance to strangers asking about religion. Initial suspicions and resistance were very real but this was probably overcome because the field workers were undergraduates from the National University of Singapore and carried their identification cards as well as a letter of introduction. Interviewers would also begin by assuring potential respondents that the questionnaire was straightforward, concerned with recording their patterns of worship rather than eliciting their views of religion and that they would remain anonymous.

4.6 In-depth interviews

The sample of respondents in the questionnaire survey was also to provide a sampling frame from which potential second stage in-depth interviewees were to be selected. Hence, once the questionnaire survey was set in motion, field workers began simultaneously to look out for potential interviewees for the second stage of field work. Here, the process of theoretical sampling discussed above was put into practice,

and respondents were selected on the basis of several characteristics: the importance of religion to them; their degree of involvement in religious activities; and the extent to which the respondent had contact with other religious places. An attempt was also made to include interviewees of various age groups and both males and females. The initial intention was to interview two members from each religious group plus a religious functionary from each group. This would total fifteen interviewees. In the end, because there were more volunteers and interesting cases, I interviewed 23 people in depth. Appendix C lists the characteristics of each interviewee.

The number of interview sessions with each individual and the length of each session varied. Some individuals were interviewed only once, for an hour and a half to two hours; others were interviewed up to three times for about an hour each time. All interviews were conducted in English, except for a Hindu priest (who spoke only a smattering of English and with whom I communicated through an interpreter) and a traditional Chinese religionist (to whom I spoke Hokkien). A large number of interviews (with sixteen respondents) were taped and later transcribed, but the remaining seven respondents either expressly refused to be taped, or were clearly uncomfortable when taped. In these instances, I jotted down notes during the interview and wrote down as much of what was discussed as possible immediately after the interview.

The interview sessions were essentially informal, though rapport took longer to achieve for some than for others. The interviews were conducted along semi-structured lines (see Appendix D for a description of the interview technique) and covered a range of issues. These included the religious background of the interviewee (for example, religious upbringing, both at home and in school, if applicable; practices and rituals; participation in religious-based activities); the importance of different

places of worship in their lives; conceptions of "sacred space"; attitudes towards other religions and other religious places; and reactions to state policies pertaining to religion (see Appendix E for the aide memoire I used when interviewing). As the interviews progressed, it became evident that certain ways of approaching issues or framing questions were more effective than others in eliciting answers than others; an interview technique evolved and these principles were adhered to when I conducted the interviews (Appendix D). These were, however, general principles and the precise way in which the interviews developed varied with each individual.

Conducting in-depth interviews with individuals on religious issues posed several problems which called for careful handling. First, a degree of tentativeness could often be detected when the interview moved towards the informant's views about the relationship between state and religion. Issues such as state demolition of religious places are highly sensitive. Some interviewees simply did not want to comment, and this could be because the rapport and trust just was not strong enough. On the other hand, there were those who were willing to comment but would not commit themselves. They did not want to be quoted and trusted that they would not be quoted. By talking to me, they also trusted implicitly that their comments would not be in any way used against them. It is a question of ethical conduct and the first step I have taken towards protecting their identities is by using pseudonyms for all interviewees and anything they did not want quoted stays off the record.

Second, there was also a problem in that interviewees were being asked to talk about things which some may never have articulated before -- whether religious places are sacred, for example, and what sacredness means. Some individuals seemed to take it for granted that religious places are sacred and when confronted with the need to put in words what such a belief meant, found it difficult to respond in any ordered

way. I would occasionally summarise and rephrase what interviewees had said, thus giving them an opportunity to confirm or modify what they had said. Third, talking about religion in people's lives often touched on other personal issues and individuals would talk about personal and/or family crises, such as a death in the family and the loss of a loved one. It was difficult to tread the path between being a sympathetic listener and yet keeping a professional distance, and not allowing the interviewee to become too distressed. In retrospect, it is clear that when confronted with such situations, I dealt with them instinctively rather than consciously. I encountered a fourth problem when a small number of interviewees wanted to engage me in discussions about religion per se, the teachings of their faith in comparison to others, and the merits of these teachings. One interviewee began seriously to proselytise and I had to redirect the interview without hurting her feelings. Finally, as a researcher, I carry my cultural baggage with me, forged of a Chinese background with a Catholic upbringing. This undoubtedly influenced the way in which I related to the interviewees. A rapport and understanding was often more quickly established when Catholic interviewees identified me as a fellow Catholic, but this was not possible with other groups. I also had to be careful not to allow my own assumptions, particularly about Catholicism, to influence my Catholic interviewees and to listen to what they had to say.

4.7 Archival research

In order to put together a picture of the state's attitude towards religion and in particular, the way it conceives of religious places, the first step was to go through a collection of documents which dealt with religious issues. These include government press releases, ministerial speeches, the Singapore Constitution, the statutes,

parliamentary statements and debates, and planning reports. They were easily available in the National University of Singapore library, the National Library in Singapore and for more recent material, from the Singapore Government Printers. Newspaper reports were also examined to complement all these other sources.

These various sources differ in terms of intent and audience. Documents such as the Constitution, statutes and planning blueprints set down rules and principles but did not provide underlying rationales as well. They often served as the starting point for me in establishing the facts about existing laws and official policies. I then used press releases, speeches and parliamentary debates as complementary sources. Since these were directed at specific audiences, they would more often contain explanations of policies which were revealing of the state's attitudes and the rationale for policies.

4.8 Interviews with state officials

This section of the field work complements the archival research in the sense that interviews with state officials provided information which could not be culled from documents. This included clarifying land resource allocations for religious buildings, guidelines and decision-making pertaining to their demolition and relocation, the use of buildings other than religious ones for religious purposes, and the use of public space (roads, community halls, sports stadiums and so forth) for religious activities.

Contact with the relevant departments took the form of telephone and personal interviews, as well as letters from officials who refused to meet me but provided me with information. The relevant departments contacted include the Strategic Planning

Branch and the Development Control Section of the Urban Redevelopment Authority; the Systems and Research Department, the Estate Administration and Property Department, the Estate Management Department (I), and the Public Relations Department of the Housing and Development Board; the Singapore Sports Council; the Registry of Societies (the Religious, Cultural and Social Section), the Singapore Police Force, and the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura.

There were several problems in doing this part of the field work. First, it was not always clear which departments were relevant to my research and I was often passed from one department to another in search of the elusive person I needed to talk to! This occurred not only within one organisation but between organisations as well. On occasions, those who had the information were unwilling to commit themselves and insisted that the same information be obtained from a higher authority. A few were polite but unhelpful and declined to an interview with me. However, when I did eventually identify the appropriate departments and individuals, they often proved helpful and made efforts to provide me with the information I needed.

However, for all their helpfulness, what these civil servants could not provide was the rationale for government policies and for that I turned to policy-makers. I spoke to the Minister for Community Development, Mr Wong Kan Seng during my second field trip (on 5 April 1990). His ministry had commissioned a study of religious trends in Singapore in 1988 and many of the statutory boards and departments dealing with religious matters (for example, the Hindu Endowment Board and Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura; Registry of Muslim Marriages and Syariah Court) are under the jurisdiction of this ministry. In attempting to secure an interview with the Minister, I was again passed from department to department, and person to person. It was only when all those I spoke to said they could not help me with policy

issues that I was eventually granted an interview with the Minister.

Issues pertaining to land use planning such as the allocation of land resources for religious purposes fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Development. I therefore tried to set up an interview with the Minister, Mr S Dhanabalan, but was unfortunately unable to speak to him during the period I was in Singapore.[7] However, given that policy making takes place at Cabinet level, my interview with the Minister for Community Development also allowed me to cover much of the ground I would have liked to discuss with the Minister for National Development. Although my failure to speak to the Minister directly in charge of land use planning is regrettable, it does not represent a huge gap in my thesis. Two other ministries are involved in some way with religious matters in Singapore. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office deal with problems (real and potential) arising from religious issues. Such problems include the alleged used of para-church organisations by some individuals as front organisations for a Marxist conspiracy, and the abuse of their position by some preachers to incite animosity between groups. However, these depart from my primary concerns and so there was no reason to follow up these two ministries.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have taken the reader through various stages. I began by identifying the information required for the research, and then moved on to consider the optional methods I could use, learning where possible from the experiences of

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[7] For part of the period, the Minister was on leave, and for another, Parliament was in session and my request for an interview was turned down.

other related studies. My eventual choice of a strategy was based on both the theoretical basis of potential methods as well as practical considerations. A four stage method (questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews, archival research, and interviews with key state officials) was then decided upon. Some details about each of these stages were discussed and the problems encountered in the practice of them highlighted. The actual practice of these methods are spelt out in detail in Appendices A to E. With this understanding of the methodology, I proceed in the following three chapters to analyse and discuss the observations arising from the four stages of field work. Chapter Five will open the analysis of the empirical material with a focus on the individual's meanings and values for religious places.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHURCHES, TEMPLES AND MOSQUES: EXPLORING MULTIPLE LAYERS OF MEANINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by using information from both the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews to investigate at a broad level the places where people pray (section 5.2). I identify two categories of places which are particularly important: the first comprises churches, temples and mosques (public places of worship); and the second, "houses"[1] (private, and sometimes semi-public places). The rest of this chapter will focus primarily on the first category -- churches, temples and mosques -- and the relationship between individuals and these places. I shall argue that there are two levels at which people relate to these places. One is at a public level where the interaction is obvious to all who care to observe -- for example, where people go to worship, how often and so forth (section 5.3). Another is a more private level where people invest certain values and meanings in their places of worship. These meanings are manifold -- the same place can hold different meanings for different persons and even for the same person. Section 5.4, which forms the bulk of this chapter, is an attempt to explore some of these multiple meanings.

5.2 Places of worship: building up a "religious circuit"

In this section, I establish the places at which people pray, and introduce the

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[1] I use the term "houses" to refer to people praying in their own residences, including houses as well as flats. It must not be confused with "house-temples" and "house-churches", which, for all intents and purposes, function as public temples and churches to which adherents and congregations come, and which are therefore public places of worship.

notion that these places form a "religious circuit" around which people move. I will argue that these places are part of a totality or a system; in other words, each place is neither independent of nor dispensable to the whole. Each is invested with particular symbolic meanings, and is tied into a particular pattern of everyday life for adherents. Of all these places, I will show that public places of worship in the form of churches, temples and mosques are especially significant hubs along the religious circuit. This leads to my focus on these buildings in the rest of the chapter.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to clarify my usage of the term "prayer". I adopt a wide interpretation, including both public and private forms of worship. For example, prayer includes the Christian's practice of attending mass or service, Bible study groups, neighbourhood "rosary groups", as well as the practice of "quiet time" when each individual communicates with his/her God and ponders the scriptures. Prayer also includes the Chinese religionist's ritual of burning joss sticks for the Kitchen God for instance, and the Buddhist's practice of chanting the mantras. For the Hindus, prayer can mean lighting the oil lamp and a quiet moment in front of the home altar, or going to the temple for puja. For Muslims, prayer includes the five daily prayers and the time spent studying or reading the Koran. This list is not exhaustive; it serves only to illustrate the wide range of religious practices included in the definition of "prayer" so as to take account of the different conceptions of worship in the different religions. With this in mind, my primary aim in this section is to find out where people pray and the following discussion will be organised in terms of religious groups.

The most important place for Catholics appears to be in church: 94.8% of the Catholic respondents said that they pray in church (Table 5.1). This high percentage reflects a fulfilment of obligatory Sunday worship for Catholics. A close second in

Table 5.1: Places of worship: Establishing a "religious circuit"

Place	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists	Muslims
Mosque/ church/ temple[1]	94.8% (55)	98.6% (72)	100.0% (43)	87.7% (200)	87.8% (86)
House[2]	89.7% (52)	93.2% (68)	81.4% (35)	87.3% (199)	93.9% (92)
School/ workplace	24.1% (14)	41.1% (30)	2.3% (1)	5.3% (12)	37.8% (37)
Other places[3]	13.8% (8)	20.5% (15)	- (-)	- (-)	1.0% (1)
Nowhere	1.7% (1)	- (-)	- (-)	0.4% (1)	2.0% (2)
Total[4]	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)	100.0% (43)	100.0% (228)	100.0% (98)

[1] This includes house-churches and house-temples which function as public places of worship.

[2] This refers only to one's own house. It does not include praying at other people's houses, nor house-churches and house-temples.

[3] This includes for example, roadside shrines, keramat and other people's houses.

[4] The percentages in each column do not add up to 100.0% because each respondent may pray at more than one place.

importance is the house, with 89.7% of the respondents saying they pray at home[2]. Within the house, Catholic respondents said they prayed virtually anywhere, though there is a stronger tendency to do so in one's own bedroom (51.7%) (Table 5.2), where there is quiet and privacy. A high proportion also pray in the living room (36.2%), and this usually takes the form of prayer group meetings amongst friends and neighbours. A significant proportion of respondents also pray at an altar in the house (32.8%). Apart from the church and house, there are those who pray at school or in their workplace (24.1%). If individuals are from mission schools, then there are formalised community prayer sessions, either in the form of mass/service or prayers at the start of the day before classes begin. Those not in mission schools often have their own prayer groups, or prayers could be a matter of personal communication between individuals and their God. Finally, 13.8% of Catholic respondents also said they pray in "other places". For the most part, this refers to their prayer group sessions in other peoples' houses.

The pattern for "Other Christians" is very similar to that for Catholics. The church is of greatest significance, with 98.6% praying there (Table 5.1). While "church" for Catholics refers to regular church buildings, for the "Other Christians", it also includes house-churches, congregations using school halls, public auditoriums and hotel function rooms. As with Catholics, the high percentage of "Other Christians" praying at church reflects the fulfilment of weekly obligatory worship. The house is a close second (93.2%) and within it, the bedroom is particularly significant (82.2%) (Table 5.2),

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[2] In the literature on "homes", a distinction is made between the concepts of "house" and "home". The "house" is a "dwelling place", "an object", and "a part of the environment" (Dovey, 1985:34). "Home", on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between people and their environment. It is "an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places" (Dovey, 1985:34). However, here, and in subsequent chapters, as well as in the questionnaires, the term "home" is used synonymously with "house". Therefore, people praying "at home" refers to people praying in their own houses as opposed to praying in house-churches.

Table 5.2: Places of worship within the house

Place	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists	Muslims
Altar	32.8% (19)	2.7% (2)	79.1% (34)	74.1% (169)	- (-)
Living room	36.2% (21)	41.1% (30)	2.3% (1)	16.2% (37)	22.4% (22)
Bedroom	51.7% (30)	82.2% (60)	7.0% (3)	2.6% (6)	83.7% (82)
Kitchen	19.0% (11)	32.9% (24)	- (-)	6.1% (14)	- (-)
Other places[1]	20.7% (12)	38.4% (28)	2.3% (1)	9.6% (22)	18.4% (18)
N.A.[2]	10.3% (6)	6.8% (5)	18.6% (8)	12.7% (29)	6.1% (6)
Total[3]	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)	100.0% (43)	100.0% (228)	100.0% (98)

[1] This includes for example, access corridors, balconies and dining rooms.

[2] This refers to those who do not pray at home.

[3] The percentages and numbers in each column do not add up to 100.0% and the total number of respondents within each category respectively because each respondent may pray at more than one place within the house.

more so than it was for Catholics. This accords well with the "Other Christians'" claim that they desire privacy during prayers, one of the important reasons they cited for praying at home (26.0%). The school/workplace is also significant (41.1%), for the same reasons cited above for Catholics. Similarly, the 20.5% who indicated that they prayed at "other places" were referring in large part to prayer group sessions in other peoples' houses.

For Hindus, the temple is clearly important because all respondents indicated that they go to pray in the temple (Table 5.1). The house is also important with 81.4% of all Hindu respondents praying there. Within the house, the single most important area is the altar (79.1%) (Table 5.2). The school/workplace plays only a small role for the Hindu community. Only 2.3% pray at these places.

The temple[3] and house are almost equally important for Chinese religionists: 87.7% pray at temples while 87.3% pray in their own houses (Table 5.1). Within the house, the altar is again of tremendous significance (74.1%) (Table 5.2). Only 5.3% pray at school/workplace. Apart from these places, there are roadside shrines which, through personal observation, appear to be a part of the religious circuit for Chinese religionists. However, when asked in the questionnaire for places where they may pray, these shrines were hardly mentioned. From the in-depth interviews, it is apparent that respondents do not see themselves as "praying" at these shrines. Instead, the red tablets or offerings of fruits and tea which constitute these shrines are sometimes left by the roadside to appease spirits deemed to be bringing people bad luck or to rid oneself of such luck. Alternatively, the red tablets may be parts of old altars at home which are being discarded for new ones. There is a reluctance to

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[3] This includes regular temples, house-temples, monasteries, nunneries, vegetarian halls and Buddhist centres.

throw them away and so people leave them beneath trees for instance (Plate 5.1). On the other hand, if people do see themselves as praying at these shrines at all, it is not on a routine basis: this is why they did not emerge in the questionnaire results as significant points along the religious circuit.

For Muslims, both the mosque and house are important places of worship but unlike the other groups, the house seems to be more important than the mosque. While 93.9% pray in their own houses, the figure for mosques is 87.8% (Table 5.1). The lower figure for mosque attendance probably reflects this religion's proscribed behaviour towards women and women's responses to these proscriptions. Unlike male Muslims who must go to mosque once a week, women are not obliged to do so (For a discussion of the status and role of women in Islam, see Crim, 1981:806-809; Glasse, 1989:419-421; and Carmody, 1989:185-207). Although there are now women's galleries in Singapore's modern mosques, a significant proportion of women are still under the impression that they "cannot" go to the mosque. These same women would pray at home, thus explaining the higher figure for Muslims who pray at home.

Within the house, most Muslims (83.7%) pray in their bedroom (Table 5.2), primarily for the privacy and quiet that this room offers. Aside from the house and mosque, a significant proportion (37.8%) also pray at school/workplace. The relatively high figure reflects the obligatory prayers five times a day and for many, part of the day is spent at work or in school. Muslims therefore pray wherever they may be. In addition to all these places, it would appear from my field observation that keramats form part of the religious circuit for Muslims. However, in both the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, keramats did not emerge as particularly significant. This could be for two reasons, First, with increasing modernisation, such sacred places are fast disappearing (See Mohamed Nahar, 1984/85:75-77), and it could be that

Plate 5.1 Religious paraphernalia by a roadside

with their demise, keramat-worship is correspondingly on the decline. Second, it could also be that keramat-worship is not an orthodox part of Muslim worship and so people omit to mention them.

To sum up, people of the various religious groups pray in a number of places, all forming a religious circuit around which they move (Figure 5.1). In all instances, there are particularly important hubs along the circuit: first, the public place of worship in the form of church, mosque and temple; and second, the house, both as a private place where people pray individually or as a family, and a semi-public place, when friends and neighbours come together for prayer group sessions. Given the primary importance of the public place of worship in all instances, the rest of this chapter will go on to focus specifically on churches, temples and mosques. The house as a place of worship will be dealt with in Chapter Seven.

5.3 Churches, temples and mosques: Exploring public levels of interaction

This section will discuss interaction between adherents and churches, temples and mosques. The aim here is to analyse the trends for each group in terms of overt levels of interaction: that is, how often adherents go to churches, temples and mosques (section 5.3.1) and where they go to (section 5.3.2). In discussing specific destinations, adherents' reasons for choosing these places will also be examined. These will provide a glimpse of some of the latent, private meanings invested in churches, temples and mosques. In this sense, section 5.3.2 will act as a bridge to section 5.4, which will explore multiple layers of latent meanings for religious buildings.

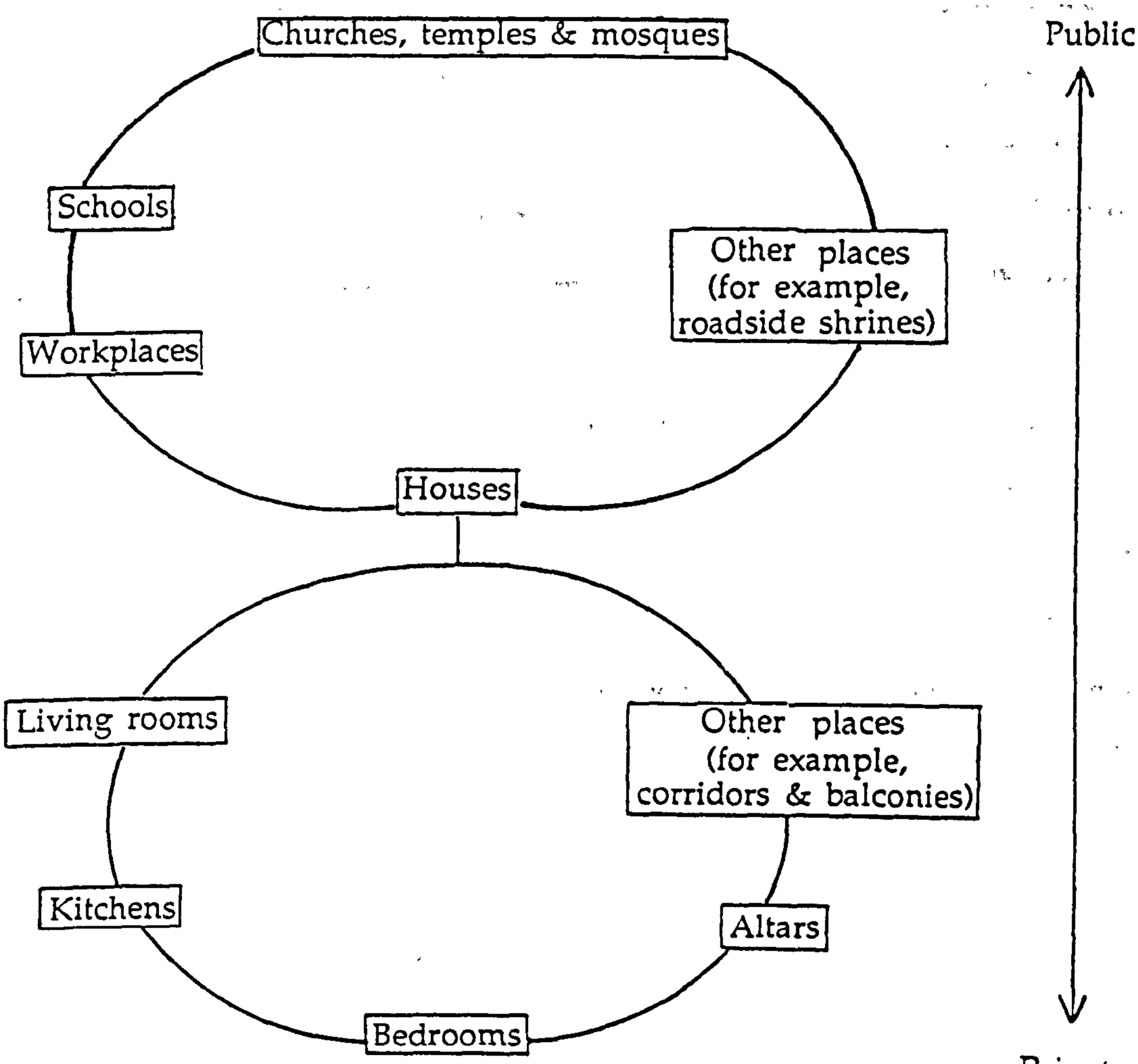

Figure 5.1: Establishing religious circuits

5.3.1 Frequency of visits

By analysing the frequency of visits to churches, temples and mosques in this section, I will illustrate how visits to public places of worship are patterned in a rhythmic cycle. For most adherents, it is a weekly cycle; for others, it may be a daily rhythm; and for yet others, it could be "seasonal", based on the occurrence of special occasions in the religious calendar. Such rhythmic cadences illustrate how these places in the religious circuit are part of a pattern in the everyday lives of adherents.

For Muslims, the largest proportion of respondents (45.9%) go to mosque once a week (Table 5.3). A significant proportion (23.5%) go more than once a week. This totals 69.4% who fulfil the obligation of weekly congregational worship. It reflects closely the 73.5% in Kuo and Quah's (1988) sample who went to the mosque at least four times a month. As for the remaining respondents, 12.2% never go to mosque while another 9.2% go only on a few occasions a year or even less. From Table 5.3, it is clear that at least a quarter of the respondents do not fulfil their obligations to pray at mosque every Friday. In large part, this can be attributed to the religion's proscribed behaviour towards women as discussed in section 5.2. Of those who never go to mosque and those who go very infrequently, the majority are women. For example, while 2.0% of males never go to mosque, the corresponding figure is 16.3% for females (Table 5.4).

The largest proportion of Catholic respondents (58.6%) also go to church once a week while 24.1% go more than once a week (Table 5.3). In total, 82.7% go to church four or more times per month, which accords well with the MCD survey which reported 88.3% of Catholics attending church that regularly (Kuo and Quah, 1988:40). As with the Muslims, this high rate of regular attendance reflects the

Table 5.3: Frequency of visit to church, temple or mosque

Frequency	Muslims	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists
More than once a week	23.5% (23)	24.1% (14)	24.7% (18)	11.6% (5)	3.5% (8)
Once a week	45.9% (45)	58.6% (34)	61.6% (45)	46.5% (20)	3.1% (7)
Once every 2-3 weeks	5.1% (5)	6.9% (4)	2.7% (2)	27.9% (12)	9.2% (21)
Once a month	4.1% (4)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	11.8% (27)
A few times a year or less	9.2% (12)	5.2% (3)	9.6% (7)	14.0% (6)	60.1% (137)
Never	12.2% (9)	5.2% (3)	1.4% (1)	- (-)	12.3% (28)
Total	100.0% (98)	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)	100.0% (43)	100.0% (228)

Table 5.4: Frequency of visits to mosque: Differences between male and female Muslim respondents

Frequency	Male	Female
More than once a week	38.8% (19)	8.2% (4)
Once a week	49.1% (24)	42.8% (21)
Once every 2-3 weeks	2.0% (1)	8.2% (4)
Once a month	- (-)	8.2% (4)
A few times a year or less	8.1% (4)	16.3% (8)
Never	2.0% (1)	16.3% (8)
Total	100.0% (49)	100.0% (49)

obligatory nature of weekly worship. Only 5.2% of Catholics never go to church and all are tertiary-educated males living in private flats and houses or the bigger HDB and HUDC flats. In short, they enjoy a high socio-economic status. They are also all "born into" Catholicism rather than converts and in that sense, did not choose their own religion.

In the case of "Other Christians", the most common trend is also for respondents to go to church once a week (61.6%) (Table 5.3). This is followed by those who go more than once a week (24.7%). This totals 86.3% who go four or more times a month, compared to Kuo and Quah's (1988:40) figure of 82.3%. These very frequent church-goers are all of at least secondary school education (Table 5.5). They also belong to the youngest and oldest age categories in this sample (15-19 years old and 50-59 years old) (Table 5.6). On the other end of the scale, there are those who go to church only a few times a year or less and they constitute 9.6% of the "Other Christians" sampled. They in turn are primarily of lower education levels and come from the poorer housing categories (Table 5.7). Only one respondent in this sample never goes to church and he shares the precise characteristics of the Catholic respondents who never go to church -- male, highly-educated, of high socio-economic status and a non-convert. In short, the frequent church-goers tend to be the very young or the very old, and most are of higher educational levels. On the other hand, the infrequent and non-church-goers are both the very highly educated and the very poorly educated; and on extreme ends of the socio-economic ladder.

Every Hindu respondent in the sample goes to temple, and most (46.5%) do so on a regular weekly basis (Table 5.3), closely comparable with Kuo and Quah's (1988:40) 46% who go to temple four times or more a week. This is significant because unlike Islam and Christianity, Hinduism does not advocate obligatory weekly worship.

Table 5.5: Frequency of visits to church: Differences between "Other Christians" of different education levels

Frequency	Education level				
	None	Primary	Secondary	Pre-univ.	Tertiary
More than once a week	- (-)	- (-)	25.0% (7)	37.5% (6)	16.6% (4)
Once a week	- (-)	- (-)	71.4% (20)	50.0% (8)	70.8% (17)
Once every 2-3 weeks	- (-)	- (-)	3.6% (1)	- (-)	4.2% (1)
Once a month	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
A few times a year or less	100.0% (2)	100.0% (3)	- (-)	12.5% (2)	4.2% (1)
Never	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	4.2% (1)
Total	100.0% (2)	100.0% (3)	100.0% (28)	100.0% (16)	100.0% (24)

Table 5.6: Frequency of visits to church: Differences between "Other Christians" of different age groups

Frequency	Age group (in years)					
	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and above
More than once a week	55.6% (5)	23.0% (6)	20.8% (5)	- (-)	66.7% (2)	- (-)
Once a week	33.3% (3)	73.1% (19)	66.7% (16)	54.5% (6)	33.3% (1)	- (-)
Once every 2-3 weeks	11.1% (1)	- (-)	- (-)	9.1% (1)	- (-)	- (-)
Once a month	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
A few times a year or less	- (-)	- (-)	12.5% (3)	36.4% (4)	- (-)	- (-)
Never	- (-)	3.9% (1)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
Total	100.0% (9)	100.0% (26)	100.0% (24)	100.0% (11)	100.0% (3)	- (-)

Table 5.7: Frequency of visits to church: Differences between "Other Christians" of different housing categories

Frequency	Housetype				
	HDB 1 & 2 room	HDB 3 room	HDB 4 room	HDB 5 room, HDB executive & HUDC	Private flats & houses
More than once a week	- (-)	43.5% (10)	29.4% (5)	33.3% (3)	- (-)
Once a week	50.0% (3)	47.8% (11)	70.6% (12)	55.6% (5)	77.7% (14)
Once every 2-3 weeks	16.7% (1)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	5.6% (1)
Once a month	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
A few times a year or less	33.3% (2)	8.7% (2)	- (-)	11.1% (1)	11.1% (2)
Never	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	5.6% (1)
Total	100.0% (6)	100.0% (23)	100.0% (17)	100.0% (9)	100.0% (18)

The next most common category comprises those who go to temple once every two to three weeks and they constitute 27.9% of the sample. In both cases, respondents are from all age, sex, education and housing groups. The fact that a large proportion of respondents are drawn to the temple so regularly and frequently, particularly when it is not obligatory, suggests that the temple may hold special symbolic meanings in the lives of Hindus. It is not immediately apparent in this analysis of public patterns of interaction what meanings the temple holds. It is only through an analysis of the private values and meanings people invest in their temples that this behaviour can be understood. This will be discussed in section 5.4.

In the case of Chinese religionists, the pattern differs from preceding ones where respondents most commonly go to the place of worship once a week. In this instance, most respondents (60.1%) go to temple on a few occasions a year or less (Table 5.3). The second largest majority (12.3%) never go to temple and these are more often the younger and more highly educated respondents. For example, 25.9% of the 15-19 year olds never go to temple as opposed to 2.5% of the 40-49 year olds (Table 5.8). 19.0% of the tertiary-educated never go to temple as opposed to 8.1% of those with no education (Table 5.9). The general pattern of infrequent temple-visiting would seem to imply that the symbolic values invested in Chinese temples differ from those invested in churches, mosques and Hindu temples. I would suggest one of the main differences is that Chinese temples are not social centres in the same way as buildings of other religious groups. This will be taken up again in section 5.4.3.

In sum, I have identified two broad significant trends. First, the majority of adherents in all religious groups, with the exception of Chinese religionists, go to their respective temples once a week. This satisfies the obligation that Muslims, Catholics and "Other Christians" are expected to fulfil but does not explain the frequency with

Table 5.8: Frequency of visits to temple: Differences between Chinese Religionists of different age groups

Frequency	Age group (in years)					
	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and above
More than once a week	7.4% (2)	- (-)	3.7% (2)	10.0% (4)	- (-)	- (-)
Once a week	3.7% (1)	2.6% (1)	- (-)	10.0% (4)	- (-)	2.9% (1)
Once every 2-3 weeks	3.7% (1)	18.4% (7)	14.8% (8)	2.5% (1)	5.7% (2)	5.9% (2)
Once a month	7.4% (2)	5.3% (2)	7.4% (4)	15.0% (6)	20.0% (7)	17.7% (6)
A few times a year or less	51.9% (14)	50.0% (19)	68.5% (37)	60.0% (24)	68.6% (24)	67.6% (23)
Never	25.9% (7)	23.7% (9)	5.6% (3)	2.5% (1)	5.7% (2)	5.9% (2)
Total	100.0% (27)	100.0% (38)	100.0% (54)	100.0% (40)	100.0% (35)	100.0% (34)

Table 5.9: Frequency of visits to temple: Differences between Chinese Religionists of different education levels

Frequency	Education level				
	None	Primary	Secondary	Pre-univ.	Tertiary
More than once a week	5.4% (2)	- (-)	4.4% (4)	10.0% (1)	4.8% (1)
Once a week	2.7% (1)	1.5% (1)	5.4% (5)	- (-)	- (-)
Once every 2-3 weeks	2.7% (1)	5.9% (4)	13.0% (12)	10.0% (1)	14.3% (3)
Once a month	2.7% (1)	19.4% (13)	12.0% (11)	- (-)	4.8% (1)
A few times a year or less	78.4% (29)	64.2% (43)	50.0% (46)	70.0% (7)	57.1% (12)
Never	8.1% (3)	9.0% (6)	15.2% (14)	10.0% (1)	19.0% (4)
Total	100.0% (37)	100.0% (67)	100.0% (92)	100.0% (10)	100.0% (21)

which Hindus go to their temples. Second, most Chinese religionists go to temple only on a few occasions a year or less. This is particularly so with the younger and more educated adherents. Both trends are consistent with those found in the study by Kuo and Quah (1988). Charting these frequencies of visits is a first step towards understanding the interaction between adherents and their religious places. It does not, however, allow me to explore the relationships between people and their particular religious places. One way to advance this understanding would be to find out which particular churches, temples or mosques people go to, and what it is in the particular place which attracts them there. The next section addresses these questions.

5.3.2 Churches, temples and mosques: Specific destinations and the nature of their attraction

An attempt was made in the questionnaire survey to identify the specific churches, temples and mosques the Clementi people go to, and the reasons why they go to their particular mosque, temple or church and not another.

For Muslims, proximity is an important factor (67.3%) (Table 5.10) in the choice of mosques. For example, the majority of respondents (45.9%) go to Masjid Darussalam along Commonwealth Avenue West (Figure 5.2 and Table 5.11). Those who do not go to this mosque use others near Clementi, such as Masjid Hasanah in Teban Gardens (7.1%), Masjid Tentera di-raja along Clementi Road (4.1%), Masjid Al-Mukminin in Jurong East (6.1%) and Masjid Assyakirin in Taman Jurong (4.1%). Other factors pale in comparison to proximity, with about equal proportions (averaging 17%) citing commonality with friends and family, the attraction of the particular imam, and "other reasons" for going to their particular mosque. All this suggests that for the majority of Muslims, pragmatic concerns provide the initial impetus in the choice of

Table 5.10: Respondents' reasons for going to a particular mosque, church or temple

Reason	Muslims	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists
Nearby	67.3% (66)	75.9% (44)	27.4% (20)	4.7% (2)	15.4% (35)
Family goes there	15.3% (15)	32.8% (19)	27.4% (20)	55.8% (24)	68.9% (157)
Friends go there	19.4% (19)	20.7% (12)	37.0% (27)	44.2% (19)	15.8% (36)
Religious leader	17.3% (17)	19.0% (11)	8.2% (6)	4.7% (2)	- (-)
Particular deity(ies)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	23.3% (10)	22.8% (52)
Others	15.3% (15)	24.1% (14)	28.8% (21)	65.1% (28)	13.6% (31)
Total	100.0% (98)	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)	100.0% (43)	100.0% (228)

Figure 5.2: Mosques frequented by Muslim respondents in Clementi

Table 5.11: Mosques commonly frequented by Muslim respondents

Name of Mosque (Location)	Percentage (Number)
1. Masjid Darussalam (Commonwealth Ave West)	45.9% (45)
2. Masjid Hasanah (Teban Gardens)	7.1% (7)
3. Masjid Mujahidin (Queenstown)	7.1% (7)
4. Masjid Al-Mukminin (Jurong East)	6.1% (6)
5. Masjid Tentera-diraja (Clementi Road)	4.1% (4)
6. Masjid Assyakirin (Taman Jurong)	4.1% (4)
7. Masjid Hang Jebat (Queen's Crescent)	3.1% (3)
8. Masjid Al-Falah (Cairnhill Plaza)	2.1% (2)
9. Masjid Sultan (North Bridge Road)	1.0% (1)
10. Masjid Al-Rabitah (Tiong Bahru)	1.0% (1)
11. Any mosque in the vicinity of workplace	6.1% (6)
12. Not applicable[1]	12.2% (12)
Total	100.0% (98)

[1] This refers to the proportion of Muslim respondents who never go to mosque.

mosques. Meanings and values are built upon this initial choice, rather than the reverse where choice is based on certain meanings and values associated with a particular mosque. This pragmatic decision-making is understandable since going to the mosque is at least a weekly affair for many. Adherents therefore pick a mosque close by, rather than travel long distances frequently. It is more likely that people who travel longer distances to get to their places of worship, especially when there are others nearby, are those who do not go very frequently. Another possible reason why proximity is particularly important is the standardised nature of the prayer session in mosques and so adherents are likely to participate in similar ceremonies and rituals in different mosques. This differs for the Chinese religionists and Hindus for whom the different deities residing in different temples matter.

Catholics, like Muslims, show a strong tendency to go to the church in the neighbourhood. For example, 79.4% of the Catholic respondents go to the Church of the Holy Cross in Clementi (Figure 5.3 and Table 5.12). When asked why, 75.9% of the Catholic respondents cited proximity as their reason (Table 5.10). Like the Muslim respondents, this could be because the rituals and procedures for masses follow a standard pattern so distance becomes a more important criterion in the choice of churches. In addition, almost three-quarters of the 24.1% who cited "other reasons" said that they went to Holy Cross because it was their parish church or they belonged to the parish. This sense of belonging to a geographical area is not evident among the other religious groups, partly because the parish -- a distinct and formal spatial unit -- does not exist in other religions. The importance of belonging to a parish suggests these formal geographical units become imbued with social meanings, something which will be taken up again in section 5.4.3. Besides the factor of proximity, many respondents also go to their particular church because their family and friends do (32.8% and 20.7% respectively). Some find the religious leader

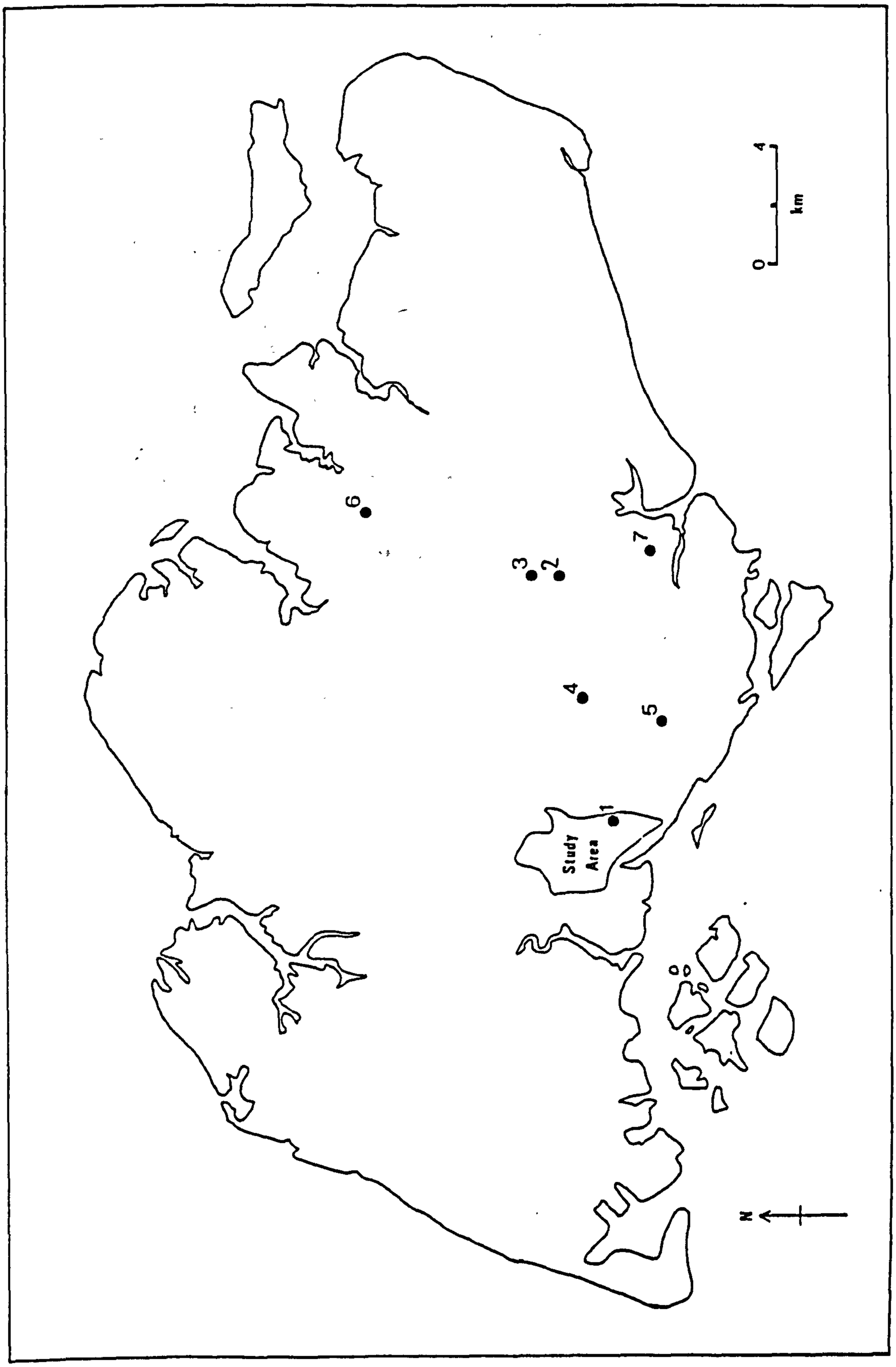

Figure 5.3: Churches frequented by Catholic respondents in Clemen

Table 5.12: Churches commonly frequented by Catholic respondents

	Name of Church (Location)	Percentage (Number)
1.	Church of the Holy Cross (Clementi Ave 1)	79.4% (46)
2.	Novena (Thomson Road)	3.4% (2)
3.	Church of the Risen Christ (Toa Payoh)	3.4% (2)
4.	Church of St Ignatius (King's Road)	3.4% (2)
5.	Church of the Blessed Sacrament (Commonwealth Ave)	1.7% (1)
6.	Church of St Vincent de Paul (Yio Chu Kang)	1.7% (1)
7.	Church of the Sacred Heart (Tank Road)	1.7% (1)
8.	Not applicable[1]	5.3% (3)
	Total	100.0% (58)

[1] This refers to the proportion of Catholic respondents who never go to church.

inspiring (19.0%), while a small minority return to the church in their old neighbourhoods, the strength of old ties outweighing the additional journey time.

In contrast, a large number of "Other Christians" do not use any one church on a regular basis. The church attended by the largest percentage of "Other Christian" respondents (11.0%) is the Church of Our Saviour in Margaret Drive, about four kilometres east of Clementi (Figure 5.4 and Table 5.13). Generally however, respondents go to a large number of different churches -- 36 in total. Each is common to only between 1.4% and 5.6% of the sub-sample. Obviously, the large number of churches visited reflects the many denominations under the "Other Christian" umbrella. These churches are found all over Singapore and distance does not appear to discourage adherents. Indeed, only 27.4% of "Other Christians" cite proximity as a reason for going to a particular church. In addition, many go to religious places frequented by their friends (37.0%) and this opens up many options all over the island for respondents. Finally, 28.8% of this group cited "other reasons" for going to their particular churches. Often, these "other reasons" had to do with "feeling comfortable and welcome" in the churches, or "feeling like part of the family", or that "people are nice and caring there". At the same time, for some, it was because the church was part of their old neighbourhood or because it was the first church they went to. In short, the social bonds and the strength of old ties appear to be very significant for "Other Christians", suggesting that such secular ties are an important component to be studied when considering people's relationships with their religious places. These will be discussed in sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3.

Neither is proximity a significant factor for Hindus (Table 5.10), partly because there are no Hindu temples in the immediate neighbourhood. Some temples, however, do attract relatively high proportions of respondents. For example, 46.5%

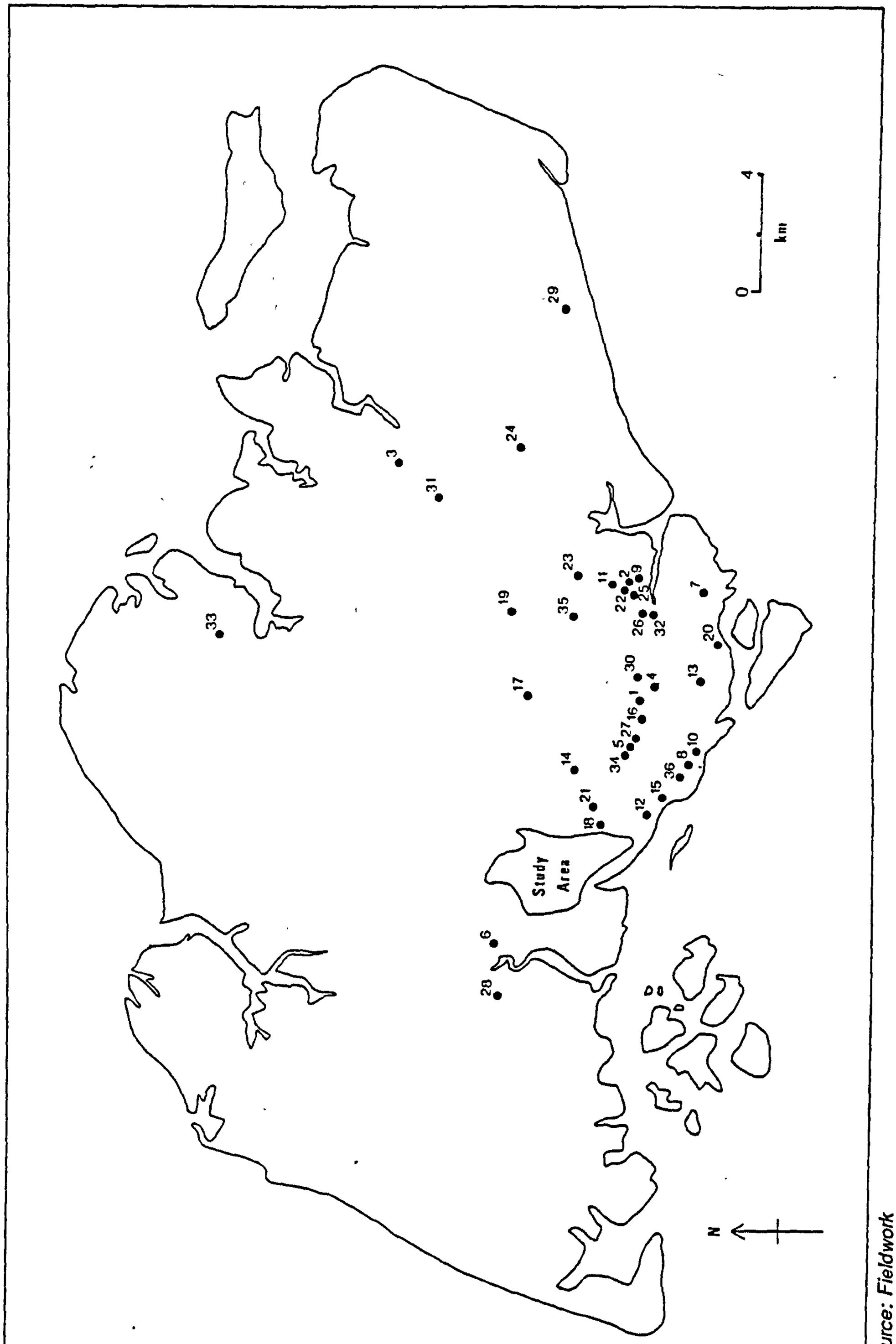

Figure 5.4: Churches frequented by "Other Christian" respondents in Clementi

Table 5.13: Churches commonly frequented by "Other Christian" respondents

	Name of Church (Location)	Percentage (Number)
1.	Church of Our Saviour (Margaret Drive)	11.0% (8)
2.	Wesley Methodist Church (Fort Canning)	5.6% (4)
3.	Harvester Methodist Church (Hougang)	4.1% (3)
4.	Mt Carmel Bible Presbyterian Church (Lengkok Bahru)	4.1% (3)
5.	Faith Methodist Church (Commonwealth Ave)	4.1% (3)
6.	Jurong Christian Church (2 Tah Ching Road)	4.1% (3)
7.	Telok Ayer Methodist Church (Telok Ayer)	4.1% (3)
8.	Pasir Panjang Hill Brethren Church (Pasir Panjang)	4.1% (3)
9.	Salvation Army (Middle Road)	2.7% (2)
10.	Pasir Panjang Tamil Methodist Church (Pasir Panjang)	2.7% (2)
11.	Wilkie Terrace Christian Assembly (Wilkie Terrace)	2.7% (2)
12.	Church of Christ (Pasir Panjang)	2.7% (2)
13.	Chapel of Resurrection (St Andrew's Junior College)	2.7% (2)
14.	Pearly Gates Christian Fellowship (Holland Road)	2.7% (2)
15.	Mt Carmel Bible Presbyterian Church (West Coast Road)	2.7% (2)
16.	True Way Presbyterian Church (Queenstown)	2.7% (2)
17.	Trinity Christian Church (Adam Road)	2.7% (2)
18.	Clementi Methodist Church (Fairfield Methodist Primary School)	2.7% (2)
19.	Thomson Baptist Church (Thomson Road)	2.7% (2)
20.	Trinity Church (World Trade Centre)	2.7% (2)

	Name of Church (Location)	Percentage (Number)
21.	St John's-St Margaret's Church (Dover Road)	2.7% (2)
22.	Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church (Prinsep Street)	2.7% (2)
23.	Foochow Methodist Church (Race Course Road)	2.7% (2)
24.	Grace Baptist Church (Macpherson Road)	2.7% (2)
25.	Hepzibah Christian Fellowship (PUB Auditorium)	1.4% (1)
26.	Eternal Life Church (River Valley Road)	1.4% (1)
27.	Church of the Good Shepherd (Queenstown)	1.4% (1)
28.	Nazareth Bible Presbyterian Church (Jurong)	1.4% (1)
29.	Emmanuel Assembly of God (Upper East Coast Road)	1.4% (1)
30.	Grace Assembly of God (Tanglin Road)	1.4% (1)
31.	Kim Tian Christian Church (Upper Serangoon Road)	1.4% (1)
32.	Zion Full Gospel Church (River Valley Road)	1.4% (1)
33.	Jordan Bible Presbyterian Church (Yishun)	1.4% (1)
34.	Blessed Sacrament Church (Commonwealth Avenue)	1.4% (1)
35.	Anglo-Chinese School Chapel (Newton Circus)	1.4% (1)
36.	Private house (West Coast Road)	1.4% (1)
37.	Not applicable[1]	1.4% (1)
	Total	100.0% (73)

[1] This refers to that proportion of "Other Christian" respondents who never go to church.

of Hindu respondents go to Sri Mariamman in South Bridge Road; and 44.2% go to Sri Thendayuthapani in Tank Road (Figure 5.5 and Table 5.14). Many go to particular temples because family and friends go there (55.8% and 44.2% respectively) (Table 5.10). A significant proportion (23.3%) also go because of the particular deities housed in the temples. Each of these deities is believed to have particular powers and respondents will go to Sri Krishnan, for example, because they want to pray to Lord Krishna. Finally, 65.1% cited "other reasons", including the "peacefulness" and "quiet" of the temple, and the "attachment to it". These words provide a glimpse of the private levels at which Hindus relate to their religious places. They hint at the importance of place attachments and the possibility of divine experiences at these places, and suggest a need to further explore these feelings and experiences. All these will be taken up again in section 5.4.

In the case of Chinese religionists, one temple stands out particularly and that is the Kuan Yin (Goddess of Mercy) Temple in Waterloo Street. As many as 60.1% of the respondents go to this temple (Figure 5.6 and Table 5.15). Excluding the Kuan Yin Temple, the 228 Chinese religionists in the sample go to a total of 45 different temples and many temples only attract one of the 228 respondents. The primary reason why respondents go to the particular temple(s) is because they follow their family traditions. This is true for 68.9% of the sample (Table 5.10). Many (22.8%) also do so because of the particular deities "residing" in the temples. As with Hindus, Chinese religionists have a large pantheon of deities, each believed to be particularly efficacious for particular requests. Adherents are thus willing to travel long distances to seek out a particular deity and temple. As a result, proximity emerges far less significantly for Chinese religionists, with only 15.4% of the respondents indicating that as their reason for going to their particular temple(s). At the same time, since most Chinese religionists do not go to temple frequently, it is understandable why

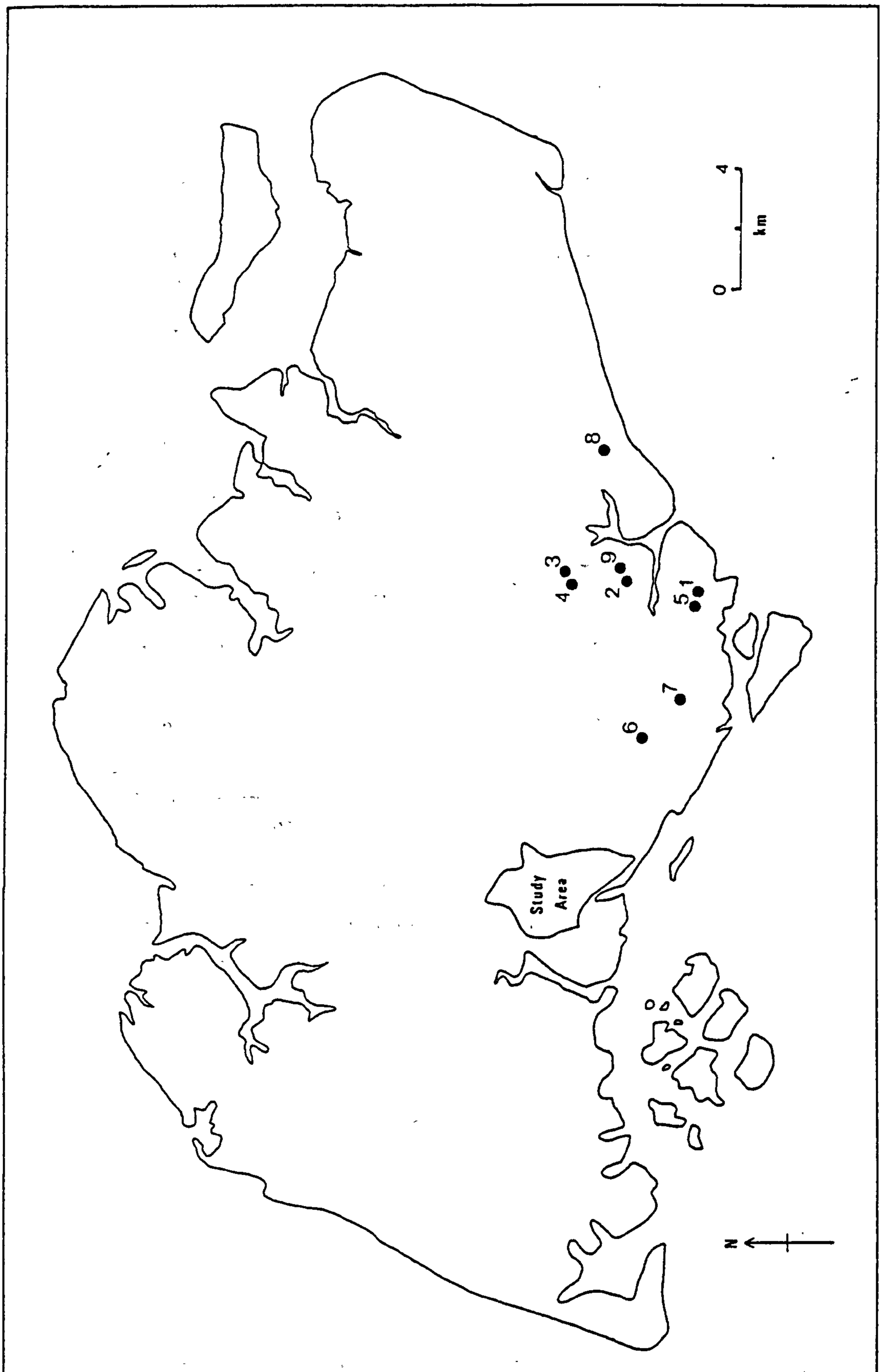

Figure 5.5: Temples frequented by Hindu respondents in Clementi

Table 5.14: Temples commonly frequented by Hindu respondents

	Temple (Location)	Percentage (Number)
1.	Sri Mariamman (South Bridge Road)	46.5% (20)
2.	Sri Thendayuthapani (Tank Road)	44.2% (19)
3.	Sri Sivan (Serangoon Road)	20.9% (9)
4.	Sri Srinivasa Perumal (Serangoon Road)	14.0% (6)
5.	Sithi Vineyegar (South Bridge Road)	4.7% (2)
6.	Sri Muneeswaran (Commonwealth Avenue)	4.7% (2)
7.	Sri Ruthrakaliamman (Depot Road)	4.7% (2)
8.	Sikh Temple (Wilkinson Road)	4.7% (2)
9.	Sri Krishnan (Waterloo Street)	2.3% (1)
	Total number of respondents[1]	43

[1] The numbers and percentages total more than 43 respondents and 100.0% respectively because some respondents commonly frequent more than one temple.

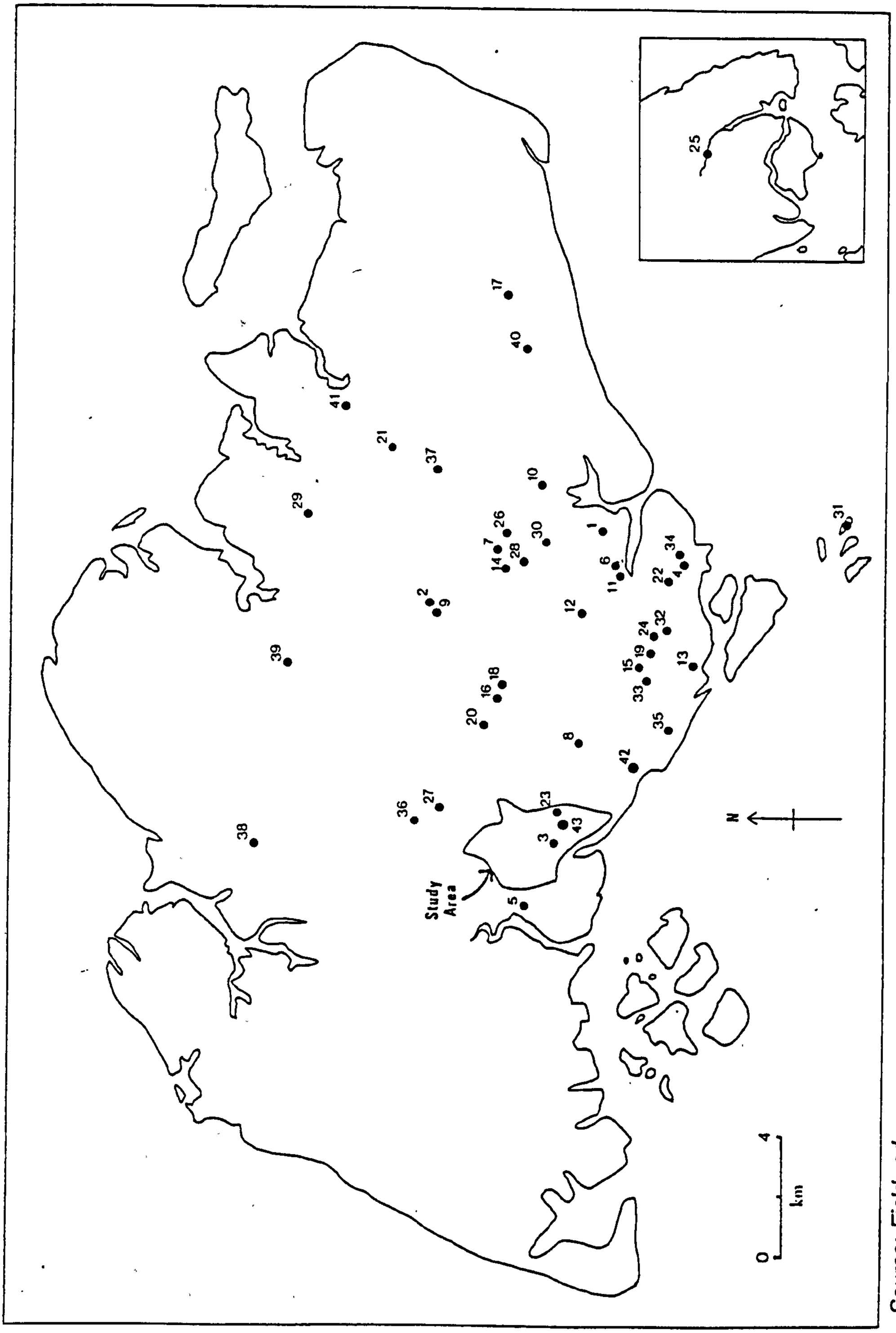

Figure 5.6: Temples frequented by "Chinese religionist" respondents in Clem

Source: Fieldwork

Table 5.15: Temples commonly frequented by Chinese religionist respondents

	Temple (Location)	Percentage (Number)
1.	Kuan Yin Temple (Waterloo Street)	60.5% (138)
2.	Phor Kark See Temple (Bright Hill Drive)	6.5% (15)
3.	Buddhist Association (Clementi)	4.8% (11)
4.	Thian Hock Keng (Telok Ayer Street)	3.9% (9)
5.	Cheng Huang Miao (Teban Gardens)	3.9% (9)
6.	Koo Soo Lim (River Valley Road)	3.9% (9)
7.	Siong Lim Temple (Jalan Toa Payoh)	3.1% (7)
8.	Da Bo Gong (Ghim Moh Road)	2.6% (6)
9.	Tse Tho Aum (Sin Min Drive)	2.6% (6)
10.	Ling Xun Temple (Geylang Road)	1.8% (4)
11.	Giok Hong Tian (Havelock Road)	1.8% (4)
12.	Kuan Yin Temple (Orchard Road)	1.3% (3)
13.	Wan Shou Tang (Telok Blangah Road)	1.3% (3)
14.	Da Bei Yuan (Balestier Road)	1.3% (3)
15.	Xi Tian Niang Niang (Jalan Bukit Merah)	0.9% (2)
16.	Da Bo Gong (Bukit Timah Road)	0.9% (2)
17.	Buddhist Society (Bedok)	0.9% (2)
18.	Tai Shi Gong (Coronation Road)	0.9% (2)

	Temple (Location)	Percentage (Number)
19.	Heng San Teng (Jalan Bukit Merah)	0.9% (2)
20.	Long Huang Si (Bukit Timah Road)	0.9% (2)
21.	Chee Leong Kong (Kang Choo Bin Road)	0.9% (2)
22.	Chi Seng Kong (Cantonment Road)	0.9% (2)
23.	Fuk An Temple (Clementi Road)	0.9% (2)
24.	Looi Yim See (Redhill)	0.9% (2)
25.	Tian Hou Gong (Kota Tinggi, Malaysia)	0.4% (1)
26.	Sri Lankamaya (St Michael's Estate)	0.4% (1)
27.	Bee Loh Si (Jurong Kechil)	0.4% (1)
28.	Kuan Chee Tong (Moulmein Road)	0.4% (1)
29.	Jayamangal Temple (Yio Chu Kang)	0.4% (1)
30.	Buddha Gaya Temple (Race Course Road)	0.4% (1)
31.	Kusu Island Temple (Kusu Island)	0.4% (1)
32.	Da Bo Gong (Kampong Bahru)	0.4% (1)
33.	Kai San Si (Jalan Bukit Merah)	0.4% (1)
34.	Fu Tak Chi (Telok Ayer Street)	0.4% (1)
35.	Da Bo Gong Miao (Pasir Panjang)	0.4% (1)
36.	Uttamayanmuni Buddhist Temple (Bukit Batok)	0.4% (1)

	Temple (Location)	Percentage (Number)
37.	Lan Chee Kok (Paya Lebar Crescent)	0.4% (1)
38.	Bo Tien Temple (Woodlands)	0.4% (1)
39.	Jiu Li Dong (Upper Thomson Road)	0.4% (1)
40.	Sian Kong Tong (Changi)	0.4% (1)
41.	Po Ti Yuen (Punggol)	0.4% (1)
42.	Private house (West Coast Road)	0.4% (1)
43.	(Clementi Avenue 1)	0.4% (1)
44.	Not applicable[1]	12.3% (28)
	Total	228

Note: The numbers and percentages do not add up to the total of 228 respondents and 100.0% respectively because some respondents commonly frequent more than one temple.

[1] This refers to that proportion of Chinese religionist respondents who never go to temple.

they are willing to travel further when they do go. Friends (15.4%) also emerge far less significantly for Chinese religionists and this supports my earlier suggestion that Chinese temples are not social centres. I will further substantiate this view in section 5.4.3.

5.3.3 Summary

In section 5.3, I have concentrated on churches, temples and mosques because they are major hubs along the religious circuits. The analysis in section 5.3.1 focused on a public level of interaction -- how often respondents visit their places of worship. In order to understand the patterns observed, there is a need to explore further the motivations underlying visits to churches, temples and mosques, and the relationships respondents form with their religious places. In section 5.3.2, I began to do this by identifying the particular churches, temples and mosques respondents go to and their reasons for going to these buildings. Identifying the precise places respondents usually go to keeps the analysis at the level of public, overt interaction but there are some glimpses of the latent, private levels of meanings and values invested in churches, temples and mosques, such as the place attachments that form, the social bonds, the strength of old ties, and so forth. These will be discussed in the next section.

5.4 The manifoldness of the "text": Exploring multiple layers of meanings

In Chapter Two, I discussed the need to understand the meanings and values invested in places, and the ways in which people experience places as "insiders" (Relph, 1976). In this section, I will explore the meanings of churches, temples and

mosques for individuals who experience them from the perspectives of insiders, as existential, lived-in places. I will argue that these places do not have a singular meaning for everyone, or even a singular meaning for each individual. Instead, I will show how religious buildings have multiple meanings for people. In the sub-sections to follow, various "layers of meanings" will be discussed in relation to churches, temples and mosques. Section 5.4.1 will deal with the religious and sacred meanings of these buildings. Section 5.4.2 will then focus on the personal "secular" ties while section 5.4.3 will deal with the social meanings of these places. Finally, in section 5.4.4, attention will shift to the meanings of religious places as symbols of interaction and divisions between religious groups. Evidence will be drawn primarily from the in-depth interviews and the questionnaire survey and, where appropriate, newspaper reports.

5.4.1 Sacred centres: places of god(s)

In Place and Placelessness, Relph (1976) argued that places may be defined in terms of "the functions they serve", as well as in terms of "communal or personal experience". In this section, I will argue that religious buildings are places, and in particular, places of god(s), precisely because of the functions they serve, and people's experiences of them. In line with this argument, the section will be divided into two parts. First, at the "functional" level, I will illustrate the ways in which these places are centres of religious activities for a large number of people. The variety and the relative importance of different religious activities for different religious groups will be highlighted. Second, at the "experiential" level, I will show how churches, temples and mosques are sacred places -- divine centres -- distinct from other "profane" and

"mundane" spaces (Jackson and Henrie, 1983:94).[4] Notions of sacredness and its connections to feelings and actions will be discussed.

Centres of religious activities: The functional roles of churches, temples and mosques

Churches, temples and mosques fulfil a major role as centres of religious activities. This section will identify the variety of religious activities and the degree of participation amongst adherents. A large proportion of Muslim (68.4%), Catholic (89.7%) and "Other Christian" (93.2%) respondents go to churches, temples and mosques to attend congregational prayers: Friday prayers in the case of Muslims and weekend mass or service for Catholics and "Other Christians" (Table 5.16). This is in line with the teachings of these religions which stress obligatory weekly congregational worship. In addition, 23.3% of Hindus also attend congregational prayers, but only 2.2% of Chinese religionists do so. This is not surprising since prayers for Chinese religionists have not traditionally been congregational affairs. While the same is true for Hindus, the 23.3% who do attend congregational prayers indicates an increasing desire to meet and participate collectively in religious and/or social activities.

While Hindus' and Chinese religionists' participation in congregational worship is relatively low, they do have high percentages of respondents going for private prayers (100% and 81.6% respectively), as opposed to 37.8% for Muslims, 51.7% for Catholics and 45.2% for "Other Christians" (Table 5.16). In addition, adherents of the

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[4] As Jackson and Henrie (1983:94) pointed out, "sacred" space is commonly distinguished from "profane" space, which in common usage, refers to unholy, and even contaminated, space. However, there is yet a third category of space -- "mundane" space -- which "ranks somewhere along the continuum from profane to sacred" and which is the space that we operate in and recognise as different from the rest of the world, but not as sacred.

Table 5.16: Common activities at churches, mosques and temples

Activity	Muslims	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists
Attend congregational prayers	68.4% (67)	89.7% (52)	93.2% (68)	23.3% (10)	- (-)
Pray privately	37.8% (37)	51.7% (30)	45.2% (33)	100.0% (43)	81.6% (186)
Attend ceremony	11.2% (11)	22.4% (13)	23.3% (17)	27.9% (12)	11.0% (25)
Attend religious course	37.8% (37)	17.2% (10)	43.8% (32)	9.3% (4)	2.2% (5)
Talk to religious leader	12.2% (12)	19.0% (11)	23.3% (17)	4.7% (2)	1.8% (4)
Meet other people	21.4% (19)	27.9% (12)	41.1% (30)	23.9% (12)	5.7% (13)
Others[1]	11.2% (11)	20.7% (12)	19.2% (14)	27.9% (12)	0.9% (2)
Total no. of respondents[2]	98	58	73	43	228

[1] This category is not confined to purely religious activities. It includes for example, attending meetings of para-religious groups, as well as attending computer classes, Indian cultural dance classes and so forth.

[2] The numbers in each column do not add up to the total number of respondents for each religious group because each respondent can be involved in more than one activity.

various religious groups also attend religious ceremonies (for example, the baptism of a person, or a religious wedding ceremony). This is true for 11.2% of Muslims; 22.4% of Catholics; 23.3% of "Other Christians"; 27.9% of Hindus; and 11.0% of Chinese religionists.

In terms of attendance at religious courses, Hindus and Chinese religionists register low percentages (9.3% and 2.2% respectively). This contrasts with the higher figures for Muslims (37.8%), Catholics (17.2%) and "Other Christians" (43.8%). These percentages indicate a major difference: the latter groups are religions of the text, and instruction in these texts is an essential part of their religions. On the other hand, Hinduism and Chinese religion (excluding Buddhism) are often passed on by word of mouth, rather than by teachers in formal settings. Even when there are texts, such as the Hindu Veda and Puranas, religious classes for adherents or converts are conducted at the Hindu Centre rather than the temples. The Muslims have well-organised religious classes, and Catholics and "Other Christians" have their Sunday school systems; there is no clear equivalent for Hindus and Chinese religionists. The Buddhists are however an exception within the Chinese religion umbrella, given that they have scriptures and instruction in these scriptures. Since Buddhism in its pure canonical form (rather than as a syncretic part of the larger Chinese religion) is a recent phenomenon in Singapore, only a small group (2.2%) are involved in such Buddhist religious courses (Table 5.16).

Generally, few respondents go to the respective religious places to talk informally with their religious leaders. Of these, it is the Muslims (12.2%), Catholics (19.0%), and "Other Christians" (23.3%) who do so more than the Hindus (4.7%) and Chinese religionists (1.8%). For the former groups, participation at religious places includes an inter-personal relationship with their religious leaders. On the other hand,

for Hindus and Chinese religionists, interaction with religious functionaries remains largely at an impersonal level. Apart from these activities, a small minority of adherents from all the various religious groups also go to their churches, temples or mosques for other related religious activities such as listening to religious talks and lectures, as well as attending religious committee meetings. These however only involve small proportions of the total sample.

Religious places and sacred experiences

Religious places are also sacred centres at an experiential level. This section will focus on four aspects of people's experiences of churches, temples and mosques as sacred places, using material drawn primarily from the in-depth interviews. The first aspect will explore people's conceptions of the "sacred" and "sacred place".[5] The second will analyse people's "religious experience". The third will highlight the importance of the physical setting in the experience of the sacred. Finally, the codes of behaviour people observe in religious places will be discussed -- often such behaviour provides the most pervasive evidence that people view religious places as sacred.

What constitutes a "sacred place"? Tuan (1978), in one of the few papers to deal explicitly with this concept, suggested a sacred place is both apart and distinct; it represents order and wholeness; it radiates power, manifested as both order and

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[5] I emphasise the fact that I will be dealing with people's conceptions of sacred place. I am not concerned with theological arguments here, although I recognise the divide between Catholic and Protestant doctrine as to whether the sacred can be localised in space. Catholics insist on the divine presence in the Eucharist, and treat relics, and relatedly places, as special objects of devotion. The latter refuse to acknowledge "such an impious mixing of spirit and matter" (Davis, 1981, cited in Muir and Weissman, 1989:94).

violence. In contemporary times, Tuan felt, a church, notwithstanding its remaining religious functions, is no longer much of a sacred place because it no longer radiates power. Indeed, he argued, the nation-state, neighbourhood and suburb have more claim to sacredness than the religious place. Tuan derived these notions from historical and biblical evidence as well as an etymological analysis of the term "sacred", but did not attempt an empirical understanding of real people who use and experience religious places. My evidence, in part, challenges Tuan's contentions, both on the nature of sacredness and the "decline" in sanctity of religious places.

Sacredness for my interviewees means experiencing a god's presence and includes the notion of preciousness. A sacred place is therefore the dwelling place of god(s) and a place in which one experiences god's presence. It is precious and not to be destroyed. It is blessed and has a certain ambience of which serenity is a chief component. It also fulfils a specific function as a place of prayer. In other words, for all the interviewees, a sacred place is indeed, as Tuan suggested, a place apart. Yet, to them, some of this apartness and hence sacredness emanates from being a place of prayer, which Tuan dismissed. Conversely, Tuan's idea of order and wholeness does not emerge in my interviewees' definitions of sacredness at all. Neither does power (manifested as order and violence) appear, although some interviewees recognised that sacred places had "a higher energy level", which could be interpreted as "power", though of a different character to Tuan's. Further, the idea that a modern church is no longer sacred must certainly be rejected. Churches, and clearly, temples and mosques, are still sacred in the eyes of adherents, with "sacredness" defined in their own terms based on their experiences, and not in terms dictated by history or etymology.

When dealing with interviewees' conceptions of sacred places, a distinction can

be drawn between Chinese and Hindu temples on the one hand, and churches and mosques on the other, in terms of notions of sanctification or the process of "sacredization" (Sahoo, 1982). In the former instance, it is possible to distinguish between sacredness that is intrinsic to the place, as opposed to that which is extrinsic. Intrinsic means the place is in and of itself spiritual. Tuan (1974a:146) illustrated such sacredness in a general way with reference to nature:

> Generally speaking, sacred places are the locations of hierophany. A grove, a spring, a rock, or a mountain acquires sacred character wherever it is identified with some form of divine manifestation or with an event of overpowering significance.

However, natural forms cannot claim a monopoly of intrinsic sacredness because it can also be true of built forms. For example, Chandran, a devout elderly Hindu interviewee, spoke of how a person may be told by a god (through a dream, for instance) that a temple is to be built on a particular piece of land, or that the god wants to reside there. The land and its temple are then sacred. This, in fact, is believed to be the case for the Kaliamman temple at Old Toh Tuck Road, which was originally located at Lorong Ah Soo. Its founder had apparently been told in a dream by the deity of the new site and as a result, the temple had been moved to the new location.

On the other hand, sacredness can also be extrinsic in the sense that it is not an inherent characteristic of the place. Instead, religious practices cause the place to become sacred. For example, as a Hindu priest pointed out, a temple can be infused with divinity through the ceremony of kumbhabhishekam (or consecration ceremony). Such ceremonies occur on four occasions: when new images are installed in a new temple; when an existing temple has to be relocated; when renovations are carried out in an existing temple; and every twelve years in the life of a temple. These ceremonies

follow a set pattern as laid down in age-old scriptures known as Agama Shastra. They contain rules, among other things, for the construction of a temple, the making of images, and consecration. Periodic consecration ceremonies are required because people pollute the sanctity of temples through acts of commission and omission. Performing these ceremonies thus re-infuses the temple and its images with sanctity. In this way, places which did not have an intrinsic sacredness will be imbued with the sacred through human ascription. While I have illustrated the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction with respect to Hindu temples, these notions were similarly expressed by Chinese religionists (with the exception of Buddhists).

This conceptualisation of sacredness as either intrinsic or extrinsic to a place negates Jackson and Henrie's (1983) argument that sacred places do not exist naturally but are assigned sanctity by people, but parallels Eliade's (1957) categorisation of religious places as hierophanic or constructed. If Jackson and Henrie's (1983) argument is followed through, then all sanctity is assigned, and all sacredness is extrinsic. Yet, as Eliade (1957:11) argued, there are places which are sacred by virtue of a hierophany, that is, places where "something sacred shows itself to us". This corresponds to places which I have identified as intrinsically sacred. On the other hand, he also recognised that "man may also construct a sacred space by effecting certain rituals." This is the second category of places I have identified for which sacrality is extrinsic.

Churches and mosques are spoken of in a different way. Although they are described as sacred, such sanctity is never spoken of as intrinsic. Instead, interviewees suggest that their churches are sacred because they have been consecrated; they recognise sacredness to be extrinsically given. The very recognition that their religious buildings are sacred is significant because it contrasts with the theological view within

some Christian denominations, for example, that the church is in the congregation and that the buildings are not sacred but functional. It illustrates how lay interpretations can differ from official doctrinal positions.

I turn now to the second major aspect of my discussion -- the way in which religious places evoke certain feelings which constitute a "divine" or "sacred" experience. In fact, the place in which one undergoes such an experience is often rendered a sacred place. James (1902:27), in his much-cited work The Varieties of Religious Experience, described religious sentiment as "a collective name for the many sentiments which religious objects may arouse in alternation". These may include fear, a feeling of dependence, a feeling of the infinite and so on. Equivalent notions are Otto's (1917) "numinous" and Tuan's (1977) "ambiguity and paradox", all of which recognise the variety of feelings evoked and their seemingly contradictory nature. All this is borne out in my empirical material. Interviewees expressed at least four different components of their sacred experience: serenity, protection, overwhelmingness and fear. For example, Cheng, a 22-year old Methodist described his feelings in this way:

> I felt it was holy. You can't put your hand on it, but it was a sense of serenity -- very calm, very peaceful kind of feeling.

This sense could be environmental in that the place could be quiet and tranquil and "cut off from the outside world", as a Catholic interviewee Joan put it:

> Beyond its arched doors of solid timber, you feel cut off from the hurly-burly outside -- the shouts of schoolchildren, the revving of buses, the blaring of car horns ... Everything is like left behind in another world.

On the other hand, it could be a sense of being at peace with oneself even if the environment was far from calm and serene. This is true of the Hindu temple

where there is "noise and colour" and "activity (is) going on all the time". As a result, "it's not a calm and a serene place", and yet, as Prema put it,

> ... the feeling I get when I walk in is one of suddenly feeling very calm
>
> ... you can stand there and you can find your own sea of tranquility.

Part of the divine experience is also a feeling of being protected while at the same time, there is a sense of-fear, as well as being "overwhelmed". In other words, there is the feeling that here is "a being greater than myself, or greater than mankind". This is reminiscent of Otto's (1917) idea that there is something "wholly other" which emanates an overwhelming superiority of power. These emotions were described in the same terms by interviewees of all the different religious groups, suggesting that beneath theological and doctrinal differences, people's experiences of the sacred are essentially similar.

While writers like James, Otto, and Tuan have dealt with the concept of "religious experience" and the feelings involved as one undergoes this experience, they have not examined the important roles played by the physical environment in evoking or enhancing these feelings. In fact, my empirical material suggests three ways in which the physical environment is important: first, the structure and architecture of the buildings are significant; second, the presence of physical forms such as statues and engravings evoke and/or enhance the divine experience; and third, colours, orientations, shapes, morphology and the like also have contributory roles to play.

First, the structure and architecture of religious buildings influence the ambience of the setting and can play a large role in contributing to or detracting from the divine experience. This was expressed most strongly by a Christian interviewee Wen Mei:

> ... anything that's less than established in a recognised form seem(s) to be less ... sacred.

Hence, a church without the characteristic steeple, dark, weathered benches, huge pipe organs, stained glass and so forth did not feel particularly sacred. In turn, a church with all its characteristic forms felt more sacred than an auditorium being used for worship, for example. Anne, a Methodist interviewee whose church had been demolished and who now worships on Sundays in a school hall, expressed her reservations:

> I don't feel like it's a church. I feel as if I'm entering school... (and) it bothers me -- a lot ... because I find that the atmosphere is not there at all.

Within the religious building, the physical setting is also seen to be important in contributing to the divine experience. As Reverend Lim, a Methodist pastor put it:

> The setting -- the interplay of light and dark, the silence, the cold, the high ceilings, the pews, the decor (that is, the cross and so forth) -- is such that it encourages introspection.

To him, it "supports the imagination" and draws one into a "meditative mood". This view is echoed by Hindus, Muslims, Catholics and Chinese religionists alike, though couched in different terms.

In addition, the space within religious buildings contributes to the feeling of the numinous, a sense of awe and of something overwhelming. For Kartini, a Muslim, the expanse of space both horizontally and vertically is overpowering; it totally engulfs the person. Kumar, a Hindu, gets the same "sense of the overwhelming", that there is an "out-of-this-world" power. For others, the feeling of abundant space contributes to a sense of peace and serenity. For example, Mrs Nair is a Hindu who often prays at a Sikh temple. To her, the Sikh temple is a big empty hall, except for

the holy book in the centre and the space evokes in her a sense of calm and peace. To Eng Teng, a Buddhist, the big, open, empty and expansive space in the Buddhist Centre he frequents, provides little distraction in line with Buddhist thinking, and forces him to look inwards and search for answers to problems within himself.

This important role of the general physical setting within churches, temples or mosques supports strongly Walter's (1988:75-77) argument in his book Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment that religious places "energize and shape religious meaning" and "help to make religious experience intelligible". Walter's arguments were couched in terms strangely similar to the Methodist pastor Reverend Lim's words quoted above. Just as Reverend Lim spoke of support for the imagination and meditative moods, Walter (1988:75-6) wrote of sacred places thus:

> Any sacred place is a specific environment of phenomena that are expected to support the imagination, nourish religious experience, and convey religious truth. It organizes sight and sound, introduces light to present clarity and order, or makes things dark to suggest unseen presences and hidden power. Mosques as well as churches have surfaces that dematerialize the walls or use other techniques to draw the believer into a meditative mood or even an altered state of consciousness. The hypnotic quality of glittering mosaics on Byzantine walls, the dialectic of light and shadow in Romanesque churches, the mystic luminosity and magic colors of great windows in Gothic buildings are all variations on a single topistic intention -- to inspire an ecstasy of place change. This impulse leads the soul toward heaven, but it also changes the place, turning the building into a mystic interior that represents the heavenly Jerusalem.

Apart from the buildings themselves, a second way in which interviewees spoke of the physical environment as an important contributor to the sense of the sacred is the presence of physical forms such as altars, crosses, statues, engravings, paintings, lanterns and so forth. The roles they play vary for different individuals. For Mr Tan, a 66-year old traditional Chinese religionist, statues are very important because the gods have been invited to dwell in them. In other words, the statues have

become the gods. On the other hand, for Soo Ling, a young Chinese religionist who was searching for a rationality in her "inherited" religion, these statues at best provided a "sense of a religious place". For yet others, there was often a rational-emotional divide in their view of these tangible forms. On the one hand, as Prema, a highly articulate Hindu interviewee suggested, rationally they were inanimate objects. Yet on the other hand, they also come to life for her:

> ... they have the most wonderful eyes. And whenever I'm there, and I go there and I look at their eyes, or I look at Siva's eyes, the one in the middle, I look at his eyes ... I almost feel like there's a connection you know. I sit there and I look at his eyes, and I don't need ... and everything else is just blocked out because something's been made. ... I mean, obviously, if you ask me intellectually, you know, it's an inanimate object; somebody drew the eyes. But to me, it means something. I'm looking at him; he's looking back. We're communicating like that.

Even if not all other interviewees felt such communication, they were in general agreement that such tangible forms were important because

> ... seeing is believing. You have to see something to feel it.

While these tangible forms are important in contributing to the sacred experience, some warned against an excess of icons because they then become distractions. This is true in particular of Christians where both the Catholic and Methodist ministers said these physical forms are helpful reminders of one's faith but they should not in themselves become the focus of worship. In other words, they cautioned against idolatry.

Finally, at a third level, the built environment also contributes to the sacred experience through the symbolism of colours, orientation, shape, morphology and so forth. This aspect of religious symbolism has attracted many writers over the years. For example, Gordon (1971:216) illustrated the symbolism of orientation in his paper

on "sacred directions", while Lip (1978, 1981) discussed the importance of colours, feng shui, orientation and axiality in Chinese temples (see also Michell, 1977; Koh, 1984/85; Kohl, 1984; and Sivapalan, 1985/1986 for further examples). Others explored the functions of religious symbols in religious experience (Dillistone, 1966; and Tillich, 1966) and conceptualised different types of religious symbols (Hutt, 1985:11-14). Despite the tremendous academic interest in religious symbols and despite the wealth of religious symbolism encoded into religious buildings, my empirical data suggests that the symbols are only recognised by a small number of interviewees and understood by few. Those who are able to decode these meanings have specialised knowledge of the religion, such as priests and ministers. The laity, on the other hand, do not recognise these symbols. For example, Reverend Vuyk spoke of the symbolism underlying the shapes of churches, citing examples in Singapore. These include churches built in the shape of a cross symbolising the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Church of the Holy Cross); churches built in the shape of a tent symbolising the tent of meeting in the Old Testament (Church of the Blessed Sacrament); or churches in the shape of a boat or ship symbolising the parable of Jesus and his disciples in a boat on stormy waters with Jesus ultimately calming the waters for his flock. Yet, as Reverend Vuyk himself put it, the symbolic meaning of the shape of a church is often "the vision" of the architect, "not understood so much by the people". In contrast, the laity remain silent about such symbolism. When asked for their interpretation of some symbols, many acknowledge that the buildings are probably heavily encoded with symbolic meaning but admit that they have no specialised knowledge of their meanings. Clearly, it is important to understand the symbolic meanings invested by producers of religious buildings but it is equally important to appreciate that the laity will not necessarily interpret them in the same way.

The distinction between priest and laity was also true for Hindus and their temples. Only the Hindu priest I interviewed described the symbolic meanings of temples: how they are constructed in the image of a human body lying down, with the head on the west and the feet towards the east. As he explained it, the Tantras teaches devotees to practise kundalini yoga, that is, yoga which awakens the divine energy within the human being which then rises through seven centres of consciousness (situated at different parts of the body) until it reaches the seventh centre which is located in the brain. To help devotees visualise this process, the temple was constructed so that different sections corresponded to the centres of consciousness of the body (Figures 5.7 & 5.8 and Table 5.17).[6] Furthermore, he went on to explain that the east-west orientation of most Hindu temples in Singapore was symbolic -- the temple was aligned with the laws that govern the movements of the sun. The first rays of the rising sun would then reach the principal deity of the temple who would then transmit it in the form of divine grace to the devotees. These contributed to the symbolic significance of the Hindu temple as a place of god(s) and as a place where the god(s) can reach out to his/her devotees, but it is a symbolism not well recognised by the adherents interviewed.

One other argument needs to be spelt out regarding the role of physical settings in the experience of the sacred. In general, I have shown that the physical environment is important to adherents' feelings of the sacred and numinous. However, Chua (1988b:37-38) argued that there is a nascent development in which some churches seem to avoid the conventional symbols and forms of a church intentionally. These tend to be the newer and more charismatic churches in which the

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[6] Eliade (1957:172) dealt with this correspondence between body and temple (or house) and beyond that, the world, and indeed the universe. He called it the body-house/temple-cosmos homology.

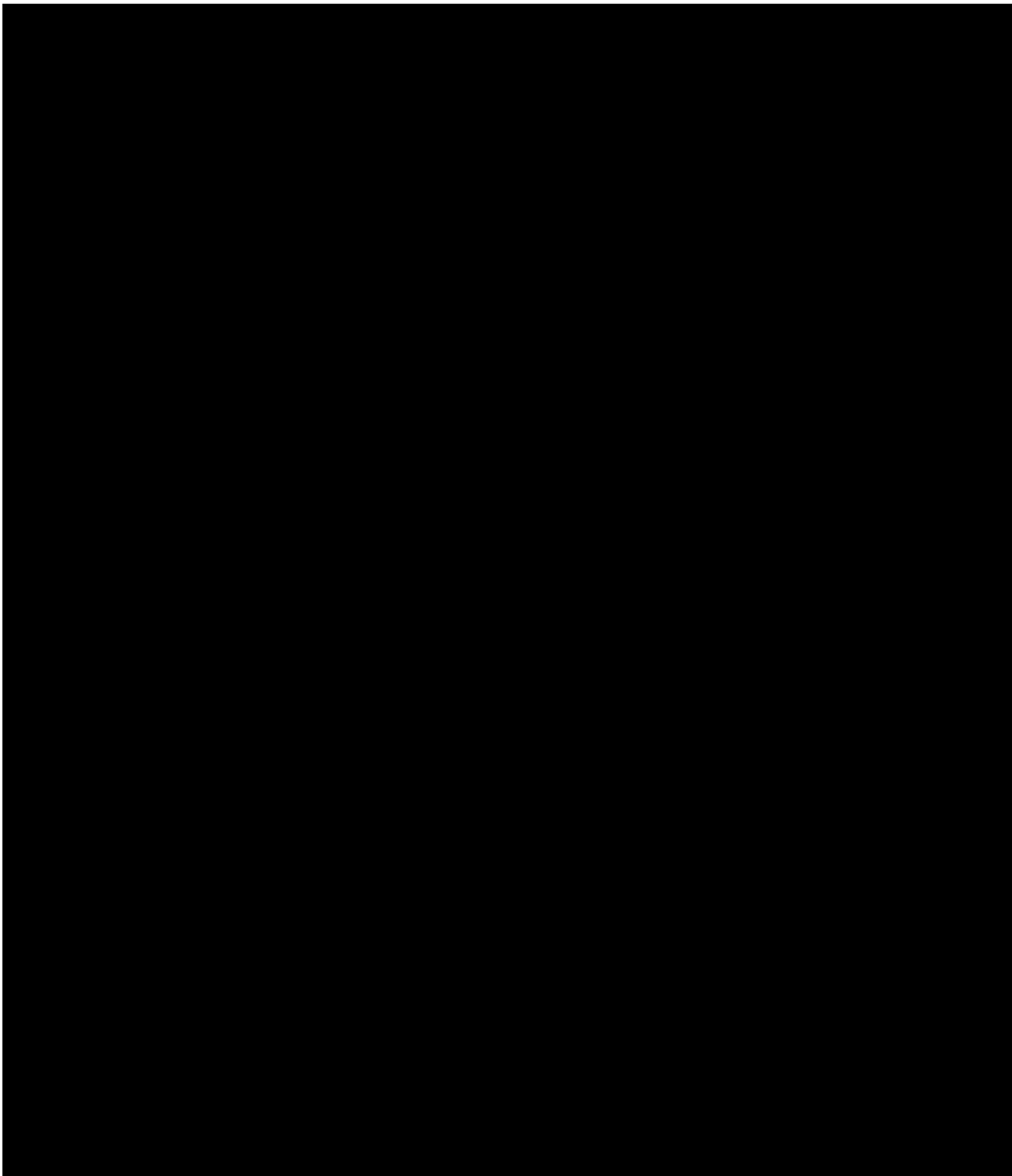

Figure 5.7: Yoga centres of consciousness

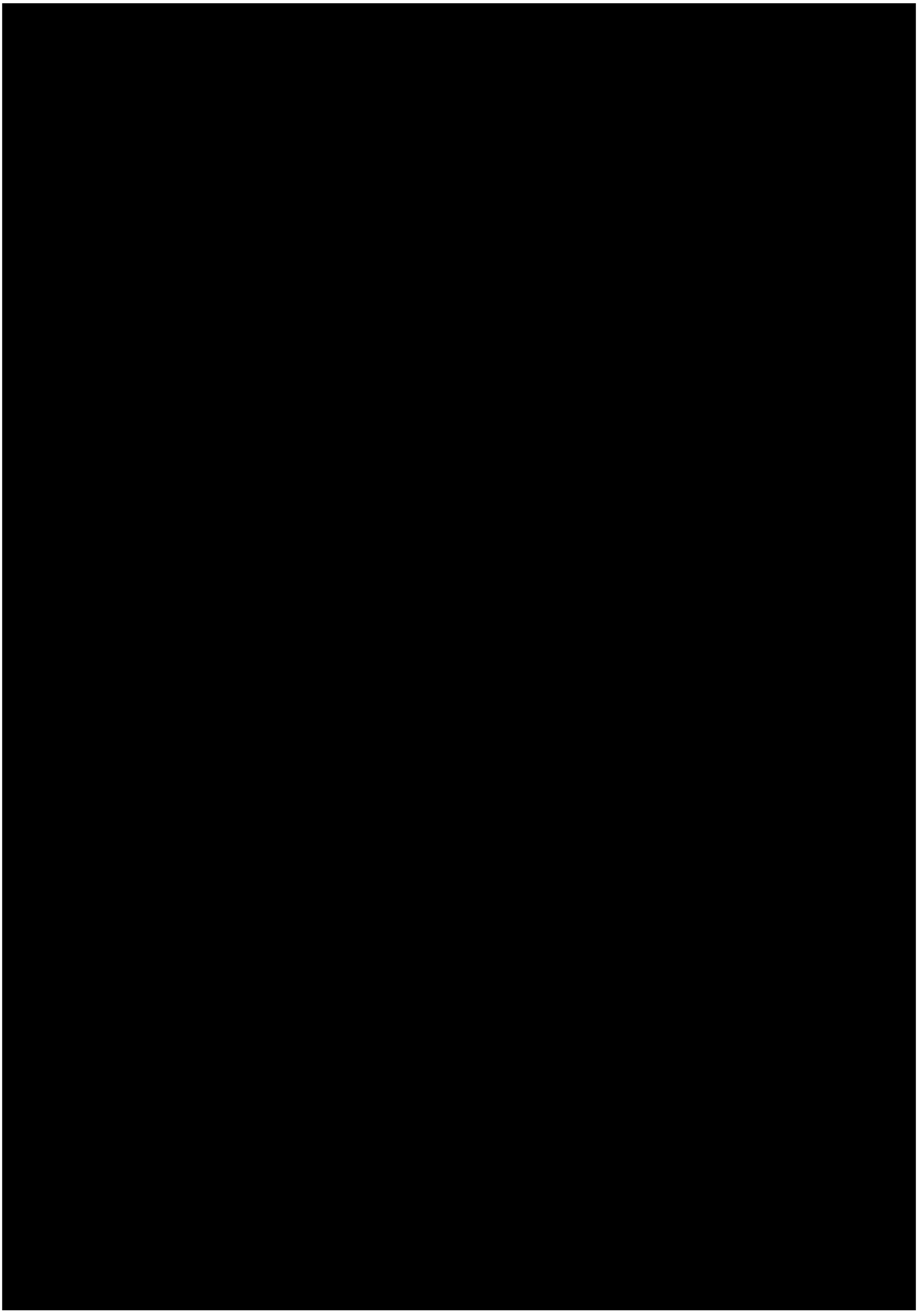

Figure 5.8: Plan of Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple

Table 5.17: Symbolic parallels between the human body, sections of the Hindu temple and yoga centres of consciousness

Human Body	Temple	Yoga System
Head	Garba Graha[1]	Sahasrara (pineal) Ajna (pituitary)
Neck	Artha Mandapam[2]	Visuddha (thyroid)
Chest	Maha Mandapam[3]	Anahata (thymus)
Stomach	Sthapana Mandapam[4]	Manipura (pancreas)
Intestines	Stampa Mandapam[5]	Svadishthana } gonads of the
Thighs	Sabha Mandapam[6]	Muladhara } endocrine gland system
Knees	First entrance	
Lower legs	Kalyana Mandapam[7] or Utsava Mandapam	
Feet	Main entrance with gopuram[8]	

(Source: Rajathurai, 1983:116)

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[1] Sanctum sanctorum, or the innermost shrine.

[2] "Mandapam" means "hall". The Artha Mandapam is where the priest stands when performing the puja.

[3] This is the hall where the images used for procession on festival days are placed.

[4] The sacrificial pit is constructed here.

[5] The Vahana Moorthy (carrier), the Bali Peedam (sacrificial altar) and the Kodi Stampam (flag staff) are placed in this hall.

[6] Music, dance, lectures and religious discussions are held in this hall.

[7] This is where the Utsava Moorthies are decorated and placed on festival days.

[8] The first entrance (knees) with a small gopuram is only present in very large temples. The gopuram at the main entrance is known as the rajagopuram (kingly tower).

theological emphasis is not on the building but the individual -- each person is saved by faith alone. The church as building is "essentially dispensable" (Chua, 1988b:38). Chua cited the example of the charismatic Church of Our Saviour to illustrate this theological position. When refurbishing an unused cinema for their own use, the charismatic group submitted a building brief to the architect which requested that the building "must not look like a church" in an "orthodox" sense (Chua, 1988b:38). The result was a post-modern building in which the exterior is characterised by a "riot of colours ... sometimes 'crashingly' juxtaposed, sometimes harmoniously blended" (Chua, 1988b:37). It has no characteristic steeple, no stained glass windows. This may lead to the conclusion that the physical setting is not important in evoking and enhancing sacred experiences. Yet, as Chua himself pointed out, once one enters the building, there is no mistaking that it is a church. This is in large part due to the rows of "stiff brown wooden church pews" (Chua, 1988b:37), creating the sense of a place of worship. At the same time, even though the symbolism may be different, there is no doubt the physical environment has been created to encourage certain modes of sacred experience, in this instance, religious joy. For example, the main prayer hall is constructed to portray a sense of liveliness and vibrance, and has creation as its basic theme. This complements the congregation's style of charismatic worship, with fast tempo hymn singing, spontaneous and rhythmic clapping, stretching out of hands, swaying and dancing in joy. The physical environment is as important here in evoking and enhancing this sense of religious joy as in the more solemn settings of orthodox churches which evoke a sense of awe and overwhelmingness.

Finally, I turn now to an analysis of people's behaviour in religious places because by far the most pervasive evidence that religious places are experienced as sacred places is the behaviour of people. There are both written and unwritten codes of behaviour which people observe when they are in churches, temples and mosques.

On the one hand, certain forms of behaviour are frowned upon and indeed, considered "desecrating behaviour". On the other hand, there are accepted forms of behaviour and ways of maintaining the sanctity of the buildings which interviewees consciously or unconsciously practise.

In the case of desecration, some forms of behaviour cannot be condoned in a place of worship. Dancing, for example, is taboo. Turning a church into a dance hall is tantamount to desecration for Magdalene, a Catholic Sunday School teacher: "How can we think of dancing in churches? It's ... frivolous ... pleasure-seeking. Church is solemn and sacred." Prema, a Hindu, speaking of her experiences in New York puts it less directly but nonetheless clearly:

> ... it amazes me that there is a disco in New York that is on the site of an old church. And nothing has changed. Nothing. I mean, all they did literally was, I think, they took out the figures and they desanctified it. And I cannot understand how someone can go in there, when all they did was say they "desanctified" it. I walk in there; I can't dance there because to me, it looks like a church!

Although Prema says her inability to dance in the church is only conditioned behaviour, I suggest she does feel that dancing in a church is sacrilegious. Her denial of sacredness is her way of rationalising her experience and feelings when the church is lost, as I will argue in Chapter Seven. Another form of desanctification for some interviewees is turning a church into a house of prostitution: to Karen, a Catholic, that would be "an extreme kind of profanation". Similarly, Joan, another Catholic, would not "dream of holding a party" in a religious building because that would be a "terrible defilement". For Mrs Nair, a Hindu, even opening up a religious place to tourism would be "almost like ... desanctifying this place". To her,

> a temple or mosque or church is for religious (activities). You open it to all and sundry and you get insensitive people walking in with their shoes and talking and laughing and gawking. Where's the respect for God? For sacredness?

Even in places where religious services are not held regularly any more, the sort of behaviour and activities which go on are still regarded as important by some to maintain the sanctity of the religious buildings. For example, one suggestion that the Armenian Church in Singapore be opened up for "passive recreational uses" and "intimate performances of music and drama" was met with objections from the Board of Trustees of the church. In framing his objections, one member of the Board argued: "although religious services are not held at the church on a regular basis, it remains a sacred and holy place" (Straits Times, 1 November 1981). In his view therefore, acceptable codes of behaviour should still apply.

While all the above appear to be unwritten but generally accepted rules of behaviour, there are yet other forms of behaviour which are considered desecration and which are written into the religious books. For example, Christians cite biblical sanction against using church premises for commercial purposes, which some interpret as including tourism and the related tourist trade. For example, Anne, a young devoted Methodist and Pauline, an equally devoted Catholic, both cite the parable in which Jesus disapproved of any buying and selling in the Temple.[7] When asked what she thought of tourist souvenir trade in the premises of religious buildings and when shown a picture of such trade in a Chinese temple, Anne responded thus:

> I don't think it should be done. I really don't think it should be done ... because it's a religious place of worship, you know, it's not a profit-making business. Religion is something that's supposed to be close to your heart; if you actually set up a business .... something's wrong ... the focus is terribly wrong and I don't think it should be, you know. It's like the ... you know, when the Lord went to Jerusalem Temple and

[7] "It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. There in the Temple he found men selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the money-changers sitting at their tables. So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the money-changers and scattered their coins; and he ordered the men who sold the pigeons, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market place!" (Gospel according to John, 2:13-16: Holy Bible -- Good News Edition, 1976).

> he overturned all the tables and the people in Jerusalem were selling doves and all that and they were turning that place of worship into a profit making business and I think that's terribly wrong because the people are no longer going there to focus, to worship the Lord but buying and selling and that is definitely not what religion is.

There are a body of rules governing entry to Hindu temples and mosques. For example, it would be desecrating behaviour if one did not take off one's shoes before entering the temple. Devotees should also wash their feet before entry, though in the past, it used to be necessary to wash oneself totally first. Pregnant women in their eighth and ninth months of pregnancy would be desecrating the temple if they went in. Those women who went to temple or mosque during the month after pregnancy and when menstruating were also considered to be violating the sacredness of the place. This is one clear instance in which prescribed behaviour is prejudicial to women, which a more "liberated" woman might find difficult to accept. Prema for example, has obvious difficulty:

> If you're a woman and you're menstruating, you're not suppposed to go to the temple. But that I have never been able to reconcile, because as far as I'm concerned, there's nothing wrong with that. And I don't think God made women not to go to worship.

There are, on the other hand, certain acceptable codes of behaviour which are generally shared among the various religious groups. For example, walking into a religious place should spell the end of incessant talking and chatting. "Joking, laughing and romping around" are not acceptable, and secular pop music is seen to be incongruous. By observing these standards of behaviour, the sanctity of religious places can be maintained. To conclude, these forms of acceptable behaviour display people's reverence for a religious place and their actions preserve its sanctity. Without the codes which are tacitly and/or formally agreed upon and which are enforced by the adherents of each religion, religious places would not be sacred places. Hence, our

actions and behaviour are important ways in which we give substance to the meaning of "sacred place".

5.4.2 "Secular" ties and "sacred" places

> The catalyst that converts any physical location -- any environment if you will -- into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings (Gussow, 1971:27).

The preceding section has dealt with one set of meanings -- the ways in which churches, temples and mosques are constituted as sacred places in a religious sense. In this section, I will focus on how they are also "sacred" in another sense -- because of the special and intense "secular" ties attached to them. These are ties with tremendous personal or shared meanings for people, and are akin to the attachments that can develop with other places, such as one's home or neighbourhood. In this sense, they are not necessarily unique, and in fact, concepts used in other "secular" contexts can be used to frame the following discussion. Churches, temples and mosques become "places" in the sense various humanistic geographers and architects have used the term. For example, they are foci "where we experience the meaningful events of our existence" (Norberg-Schulz, 1971:19); and they "involve a concentration of our intentions, our attitudes, purposes and experience" (Relph, 1976:43). Put another way, these are places with which people have developed topophilic ties or a sense of place (Tuan, 1974a & b).

Secular ties take a variety of forms. Specifically, and most importantly, they include personal relationships and experiences tied to the religious place -- so much so that the place becomes an integral part of these relationships and experiences. It

is, as Ittelson et al. (1976:204) explained, experiencing the environment as "emotional territory", and is evident when a person tends to describe his/her environment in terms of how he/she feels. For example, the church could have been a place where intense pain and sorrow was experienced, and which seemed to offer solace and refuge. Thus, many of the interviewees spoke of how they would go to the chapel or church whenever they were troubled. Joan, a Roman Catholic, put it this way:

> My mum was not well, and I remember bursting into tears one day when a colleague asked me about my mum. So I turned and ran straight to the chapel, without actually thinking about it. It calmed me: the place, and the atmosphere, and gave me a certain strength to face the world again. So in a way, that was a turning point for me and the chapel. The same with Novena Church. Mum was in the operating theatre in the hospital down the road, and I went on to Novena to pray. And there, I cried, and recovered. And felt a strength. So the church became for me the place that comforted me when I was distressed. It's become an important place in my life.

Another way in which secular ties with a religious place render it in some sense sacred is through the connection with some person(s) of great personal importance, such as a favourite relative. The religious place then takes on special meaning and significance, as in the case of Prema, a Hindu. The temple she refers to is the one her grandmother used to go to:

> ... my grandmother, the one who died before I was born: she had cancer of the throat, and they only detected it very late. They found out, and in her last year or so, she had to go for chemotherapy and the priest there would open up the temple early for her, so she could go in. And I had never been into that temple before last year, but I walked in there, and I don't know if it was because I knew grandma used to come here, and she really liked the temple, I mean, it was her favourite temple, or whatever, but I just felt real strong ... you know, I was very happy there; I liked it. I had a really good feeling about it. If they tore that down, it'd be like tearing a part of me down.

In this instance, Prema, her grandmother and the temple have all somehow become closely intertwined. Her feelings and memories of her grandmother cannot be divorced from the temple her grandmother used to visit, and tearing down the

building was like tearing up Prema's memories and indeed, destroying part of her own identity. Such is the intensity of emotions and the extent to which self and environment have merged that the environment becomes self, and self, environment. In other words, the environment has become an integral component of self-identity (Ittelson et al., 1976:202-203).

Religious places also become sacred because they may embody the past and all it stands for in a personal way. Particularly for those seeking their "ethnic" roots, this whole connection with the past becomes particularly important. Prema, having lived out of Singapore for the best part of her formative years, was seeking her roots; certain religious places were important and indeed sacred to her because they were familiar parts of her childhood and had not changed during the time she was away. They were places which she could connect with her past.

Similarly, religious places also become very highly valued when the individual has been closely involved in the creation of the place. Through the process of investing real time and effort, the place becomes a part of the person and a part of something sacred and precious. Mustapha, a devout Muslim who devotes much of his time to mosque activities, epitomises this sense in which the religious place becomes sacrosanct through his involvement in the construction of the neighbourhood mosque. He felt himself to be part of the mosque. The strength of his attachment becomes apparent when the mosque is threatened with hypothetical demolition: to him, it would be tantamount to destroying his creation.

Aside from these personal experiences and relationships with religious places which render them sacred, others also feel the pull of religious places because of the familiarity and strength of old ties as a result of time spent there. All the interviewees

felt time to be a crucial factor in the development of place attachments. For those who have been to the same church, temple or mosque for a substantial period of time, the place is cherished for its familiarity: "seeing the same gods, the same sorts of things ... the same smells, the same sights, sounds ..." By the same token, others felt this layer of meaning did not exist for them, simply because they have not had long periods of contact with their religious places. Instead, they feel such attachments for their homes and schools where they have spent far more of their time. These places then become "sacred" to them, but this "sacredness" does not derive from any religious meaning.

In short, religious places, like other places, become "sacred" to people because they are where personal relationships and experiences are anchored. As Walter (1988:21) put it,

> ... a place is a location of experience. It evokes and organizes memories, images, feelings, sentiments, meanings, and the work of imagination. The feelings of a place ... come from collective experience and they do not happen anywhere else. They belong to the place.

5.4.3 Religious places as social centres

A third layer of meaning I will discuss in this section is the social meaning invested in churches, temples and mosques. For some, the religious place is also a place for meeting other people and mixing socially. Drawing on the questionnaire material, "Other Christians" were the biggest group (41.1%) who cited "meeting other people" as one of their common activities in churches (Table 5.16, p. 226). Catholics followed next with 27.9%, with the Hindus (23.9%) and Muslims (21.4%) close behind. The group for whom this is not significant is the Chinese religionists; only 5.7% claim

that they are engaged at this social level in the temple. Of these, all are Buddhists rather than the other syncretic groups.

Another indication of the different degrees of social interaction within the various groups can be seen in the amount of time devotees spend at their respective places of worship. The majority of Muslims (34.7%) usually spend between one to two hours (Table 5.18), which would include the time spent at Friday prayers, for example, and some time after prayers just talking to other people. The same is true for Catholics, for whom Sunday mass on the average lasts between 45 to 60 minutes. Most (44.8%) however spend between one to two hours, again reflecting the way in which people spend some time talking to friends before leaving the church premises. "Other Christians" seem to spend the most time in church: an equal proportion (32.9%) spend between one and two hours, and two and three hours; and 20.5% spend more than three hours (12.3% actually spend more than five). These are people who sit on para-church committees, are involved in church organisations and who therefore spend time at these activities. In the process, they interact socially with other members. Hindu worship is often highly individual with people saying their own prayers, a process which does not often take very long. This is reflected in the 32.6% who usually spend less than half an hour at the temple. However, there are those who also spend much more time in the temple than private prayer sessions warrant. For example, 32.6% spend between one and two hours; and 15.3% spend more than three hours at the temple. As one respondent put it, her weekly temple visit is also a time for her to catch up with her relatives and friends, something she does not have time for during the rest of the week. Finally, reflecting the brief nature of individual worship and the lack of social interaction with other devotees, a large majority of Chinese religionists (51.3%) spend less than half an hour at the temple. Another 28.9% spend between half to an hour. Only 7.5% spend more than an hour, and most of

Table 5.18: Average time spent at churches, temples or mosques per visit

Time	Muslims	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists
Not applicable[1]	12.2% (12)	5.2% (3)	1.4% (1)	- (-)	12.3% (28)
Less than half hour	11.2% (11)	- (-)	- (-)	32.6% (14)	51.3% (117)
Half to one hour	25.5% (25)	43.1% (25)	12.3% (9)	18.5% (8)	28.9% (66)
One to two hours	34.7% (34)	44.8% (26)	32.9% (24)	32.6% (14)	4.4% (10)
Two to three hours	13.3% (13)	1.7% (1)	32.9% (24)	- (-)	1.8% (4)
Three to four hours	3.1% (3)	- (-)	2.7% (2)	4.7% (2)	0.4% (1)
Four to five hours	- (-)	- (-)	5.5% (4)	8.3% (4)	0.9% (2)
More than five hours	- (-)	5.2% (3)	12.3% (9)	2.3% (1)	- (-)
Total	100.0% (98)	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)	100.0% (43)	100.0% (228)

[1] This refers to that proportion of respondents who do not go to churches, temples or mosques.

these are Buddhists rather than syncretic and traditional Chinese religionists.

To understand these trends, I began to explore in the in-depth interviews some of the reasons and attitudes underlying such patterns. In the case of traditional Chinese religionists, there are not many opportunities for devotees to gather socially because worship is on an individual rather than communal basis. Thus, people come and go when they want: there are no fixed times (although there may be certain important days in the religious calendar when devotees may go to the temple). Because of such general flexibility, devotees do not meet the same people week after week. The routines of the religion do not encourage social interaction. Furthermore, another factor is the attitudes adopted by devotees. The traditional Chinese religionist's disinterest in other devotees is well characterised in Mr Tan's case, for example. He sees no reason why the temple should be the place to bring people together because religion is a personal relationship between him and his gods. As he puts it, "I request; they respond. What do other people have to do with it?" On the other hand, while agreeing that temples do little to bring people together, a much younger and far less devoted Chinese religionist Soo Ling, expresses regret that it should be so. Her opinion is shaped by her knowledge of Christian Bible study and fellowship groups where social interaction and companionship are probably as much part of the group as the religious devotions are. Perhaps the fellowship and community which is so much a part of Christian groups is one of the reasons why some Chinese religionists convert to Christianity, a trend identified in Chapter Three (see also, Kuo Quah and Tong, 1988:14-15). On the other hand, Buddhists seem to differ from the traditional Chinese religionists in the extent of their social interaction. This seems to be part of the movement towards a style of Buddhism more akin to

Protestant Christianity, including an emphasis on fellowship.[8] At the same time, Buddhist groups also organise activities which encourage interaction. For example, the Nichiren Shoshu Association participates in a range of social and community activities (such as the mass grand finale display for a few National Day celebrations), which does much to bring members together socially.

Aside from Buddhist centres, churches, mosques and Hindu temples also appear to have taken on meaning and value as social centres. For example, Joseph, a Catholic, finds in Christian teaching exhortation to communicate with other people:

> ... you can't live alone. No man is an island. You need the community. All men are brothers.... (God) wants you to love -- that's why the world is full of people.

In fact, he sees embodied in the cross a symbol of both a "God-man" relationship and a "man-man" relationship. When coming together on Sundays to worship, he believes Christians should also interact and get to know one another. In this; the church helps by organising activities which bring people together. The church as a place is important too, particularly the parish halls attached to churches, for these are settings where people meet others and hold their activities. For those who thus participate and communicate, the social component is so strong they feel as if the church is a family, with many of their friends belonging to the same church community. Indeed their social circle revolves round the church. As Tong (1989:28-29) suggested, the church is "a place where they have a "sense of belonging". It is a place to meet for fellowship, and to encourage each other. The church is liken (sic) to a family.

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[8] Clammer (1988:26-28) refered to a recent trend towards "protestant Buddhism" -- "simplified, refined, more linguistically accessible" -- in which there are fixed times for services, meditation, chanting and personal counselling with abbots, much like Christian services. There are also hymnbooks, lectures, forums and classes, after the manner of similar Christian activities.

Christians call each other "brothers and sisters", and Christ is seen as the head of the family." This is true of both Catholics and "Other Christians"; in fact, in the former instance, the Catholic parish becomes not only a spatial entity but a social community as well. This ties back to my discussion in section 5.3.2 where I highlighted Catholics' strong sense of parish-belongingness.

These sentiments are echoed to a large extent by Zakir, a Muslim. Like Joseph, he feels a fundamental part of Islam and of going to the mosque is getting to know more people, and interacting and talking with others. In his view, some of this is made possible because mosques are not only places of worship. In fact, they are also settings for religious classes, classes to prepare pilgrims for the haj, marriage counselling, poetry reading, tuition classes, computer courses and so forth, and through these and other activities, opportunities arise for greater social interaction. In the view of some Muslims, this is as it should be. For example, Haji Suratman Markasan, leader of Asas 50 (a literary event, "The Literary Movement of the '50s"), expressed the view that the mosque should be an "activity centre" beyond just being a place of worship (Straits Times, 1 August 1989). Historical precedents are often cited to support such views. The original functions of mosques in many parts of the Islamic world, especially in the Ottoman Empire, were varied. Besides being centres of religious activities, they were also political and administrative centres, where important official pronouncements were made (for example, edicts about taxes, appointment of important officers, results of battles, orders, assignment of duties and so forth). Mosques were also courts of justice, places where cases were heard and justice administered. During wars, they also acted as rallying points in the campaign for conquest; military headquarters for keeping prisoners and treatment of injured warriors. Furthermore, mosques functioned as meeting areas and reception halls to receive representatives or delegates from other parts of the Muslim world. They were

even stopping places for travellers (Melati, 1978/79:26-30; Crim, 1981:495).

While Hindu temples do not appear to have as many organised activities as mosques, there are beginning steps in the form of Indian dance classes and kindergarten classes. However, in a less direct sense, devotees go to the temple as much to pray as to socialise, particularly on festival days. Indeed, Chandran argues in favour of the Hindu temple playing the role of a community centre. In reply to a question about whether he thought the temple ought to remain strictly religious-based in its activities, he says:

> No, I don't. Because I think for the Hindu temple, and from what I've seen of it in its purest most natural form, which is in Sri Lanka, that's not what it started out as, and that's not what it is intended to be. It is part of the community. It is as much a community centre as anything else. ... So it's not important that it be ... for me, that it be solely confined to religious activity. In fact, I think it's better if it's not, because that's like saying, you take religion out, and you make it one part of your life where you put it in one place, and that place is only connected with religion. That is tantamount to saying that you can pick religion up and put it in one place and you can walk away from it, and then it's not there any more.

The role of religious places as "community" and "social" centres for devotees brings a political question into focus. Mr Lee Kuan Yew (9 October 1984), then Prime Minister, emphasised the dangers of racial and religious segregation because mosques were drawing Muslims away from the more multi-racial neighbourhood community centres. Although he spoke specifically in the context of Muslims, the possibility of the same occurring with at least some of the other groups is as high. Confronted with this potential problem, some interviewees were quick to defend the activities at their respective religious places. For example, a Buddhist nun suggested that when people go to the Buddhist Centre, it would be to learn about Buddhism -- and the teachings of Buddhism are in opposition to segregation, hatred or bigotry of any kind. Hence, there could be little danger deriving from Buddhists being exclusionary. Magdalene,

a Catholic, also suggested that if people spent a lot of time in church, rather than creating problems of segregation, it would teach them the Christian way of charity and love for others. That could hardly be detrimental to society, she argued. On the other hand, others recognised the danger of segregation more readily and suggested there should perhaps be some control of the activities going on in religious places. This reflects the recent doubts as to whether it is appropriate for computer and other vocational courses to be conducted in mosques (Straits Times, 12 September 1989 and 15 September 1989). MUIS (Islamic Religious Council) while not overtly telling mosques what to do, has taken the stand that the priority is to run religious classes for Muslims in the neighbourhood. Everything else must take second place. In fact, MUIS intends to have a bigger say in the running of mosques built under its mosque-building programme in the 1990s. Specifically, it will help determine the types of activities to be conducted and how the mosque funds can be best spent to meet the needs of the community.

5.4.4 Religious places: symbols of interaction; symbols of divisions

Singaporeans are clearly conscious of the multi-cultural, multi-religious setting in which they live and every so often, in the course of the interviews, individuals would make reference to it. The individual's perceptions of and attitudes towards other religions are reflected in what they say about other religious places as well as the extent to which they interact with these other religious places. The following discussion will focus on the extent to which such interaction takes place, the form it takes, and the reasons offered as to why it occurs. Because there are marked differences between religious groups, what follows will be organised along the lines of religious groups.

Of all the religious groups, Muslims appear to be the most introspective. They have had the least contact with any type of religious place apart from the mosque. About seven out of every ten Muslim respondents (or 69.4%) have never been into any other religious place (Table 5.19). For those who have, the place with which most (25.5%) have had contact with is the church. Such contact, for 10.2% of the Muslim respondents, has been through attendance at ceremonies (for example, friends' weddings and school ceremonies), while another 9.2% were simply "visiting and looking around" (Table 5.20). Few have attended congregational worship (5.1%) and only one respondent has walked into a church to pray privately. He is a convert to Islam and went to church to pray privately before his conversion from Catholicism.

Only 11.2% of the Muslim respondents had ever been into a Hindu temple and only 8.1% into a Chinese temple. None had ever been into a Sikh temple. Most of those who had been into the temples had not been there for any overtly religious reasons, but were visiting and observing (Table 5.20). Indeed, as it turns out in the case of Zakir, one of the interviewees who indicated that he had been into Chinese temples, they were part of his tour itinerary in Thailand and Japan. He had not visited similar temples of his own accord in Singapore. This is indicative of the attitudes adopted, echoed by Mustapha, an interviewee who has not visited any other religious place in all his 62 years, and sees no need to. He denies that this reflects a lack of interest in other religions or in understanding them, but argues that to accept them does not mean he has actively to seek them out. This contrasts with the views of Prema, who feels that if one desires to understand the cultures and religions of Singapore, one needs to find out and learn about them, and one way of doing that is to visit and see what other people do in their places of worship. The few Muslims who do visit other religious places appear to be younger, more highly-educated people who not only see the religious meanings in churches and temples but also recognise

Table 5.19: Level of contact with other religious places

Religious Places	Muslims	Hindus	Chinese Religionists	Catholics	Other Christians
Mosques	100.0% (98)	9.3% (4)	1.8% (4)	13.8% (8)	5.5% (4)
Churches	25.5% (25)	83.7% (36)	30.7% (70)	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)
Hindu temples	11.2% (11)	100.0% (43)	17.5% (40)	17.2% (10)	8.2% (6)
Chinese temples	8.1% (8)	46.5% (20)	100.0% (228)	34.5% (20)	58.9% (43)
Sikh temples	- (-)	11.6% (5)	0.4% (1)	3.4% (2)	- (-)
One's own religious place only	69.4% (68)	4.7% (2)	50.4% (115)	56.9% (33)	34.2% (25)

Note: Figures indicate percentage and number (in brackets) of respondents within each religious group who have been to each of the religious places named.

Table 5.20: Muslims: Nature of contact with mosques, churches and temples

Activity	Mosque	Church	Hindu temple	Chinese temple	Sikh temple
Visit	30.6% (30)	9.2% (9)	9.2% (9)	7.1% (7)	- (-)
Attend ceremony	11.2% (11)	10.2% (10)	2.0% (2)	1.0% (1)	- (-)
Congre-gational worship	68.4% (67)	5.1% (5)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
Private prayers	37.8% (37)	1.0% (1)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)

Note: Total number of Muslim respondents = 98.

their architectural and historical values. For example, Kartini, a 23-year old undergraduate, expresses the view that these buildings have "a lot of architectural beauty" and carry with them the history of the country. For these reasons, she has followed some of her friends to other religious places.

In contrast to Muslims, Hindus have the lowest percentage of respondents (4.7%) who have not been into any other religious place besides the Hindu temple. Indeed, they appear to have the most diversified contacts with other religious places. The church again features most prominently, with 83.7% of the Hindu respondents having been into at least one. The specific forms of interaction are varied. A significant proportion (23.3%) have been to church for private prayers, while another 23.3% have visited for the sake of looking around inside. Most have attended mass (37.2%), while 11.6% have attended ceremonies (Table 5.21). The Novena Church in Thomson Road has attracted most Hindus largely because the church accepts letters of petition to the Mother Mary. Part of the Novena service involves reading out some of these petitions and getting people to pray together on behalf of the petitioners. Many of these letters are written by non-Catholic people. In a feature article on the church (Straits Times, 6 September 1970), it was reported that nearly half of those who went to join in the petitions, thanksgiving and hymn-singing were non-Catholics. It is also common to hear petitions such as the following:

> My Holy Mother, pardon me for not writing earlier. I am a Hindu and yet you heard my prayer as my own loving mother ...

> Dear Mother of Perpetual Succour, I am a Buddhist and so are the members of the house (sic). Week after week we try to be with you at your shrine, even though the journey is tedious ....

A large proportion of Hindus have also been into Chinese temples (46.5%), while smaller proportions have been to Sikh temples (11.6%) and mosques (9.3%)

Table 5.21: Hindus: Nature of contact with mosques, churches and temples

Activity	Mosque	Church	Hindu temple	Chinese temple	Sikh temple
Visit	9.3% (4)	23.3% (10)	23.3% (10)	16.3% (7)	7.0% (3)
Attend ceremony	- (-)	11.6% (5)	27.9% (12)	9.3% (4)	- (-)
Congregational worship	- (-)	37.2% (16)	23.3% (10)	- (-)	- (-)
Private prayers	- (-)	23.3% (10)	100.0% (43)	23.3% (10)	7.0% (3)

Note: Total number of Hindu respondents = 43.

(Table 5.19). Hindu respondents most commonly go to Chinese temples for private prayers (23.3%), though 16.3% have also been to visit, and 9.3% to attend ceremonies (Table 5.21). In turn, Hindu respondents have been to Sikh temples to visit (7.0%) as well as for private prayers (7.0%).

The openness to other religions of Hindus can be understood at two levels. The first is a "spiritual" level, where Hindus go to other religious places to pray. This is obvious in the large number of Hindus who go to pray in Chinese temples for example. On several occasions when I visited one of the interviewees at Sri Krishna Temple in Waterloo Street, it was obvious that many Hindu devotees would also go to the Kuan Yin temple next door for a short prayer. The interaction is further developed with Chinese worshippers also stopping by to pray at Sri Krishna, which has also installed a shrine to Kuan Yin within its grounds (Plate 5.2).[9] Such openness can be understood in the light of one interviewee's comments:

> ... there is only one God and many paths lead to the same God. So a Hindu could pray in a mosque or church. There would be no clash.

At a second level, there are those who search for an understanding of their roots, part of which includes understanding the cultures of multi-religious Singapore. For example, Prema is in search of a first-hand knowledge of other peoples, and feels that one can learn a lot from other religions. In her view,

> ... in order to understand the culture(s) of this country, you have to go and see the churches and temples and mosques, and see how they worship ... and it became very interesting to watch the similarities and the differences. And to see how much we're more alike than we are different.... It's fascinating, really, how much we're more alike, and how people, when they worship, they're very much the same.

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[9] According to temple trustee P. Sivaraman, about 1000 devotees from Kuan Yin temple stop by to pray each month.

Plate 5.2 Pictures of Durga and Kuan Yin in Sri Krishnan

She therefore visits churches, mosques, Chinese temples, Sikh temples and so forth to observe and to learn.

Like Muslims and Hindus, Chinese religionists have had most contact with churches, with 30.7% of all Chinese religionists having been into one (Table 5.19). Some go to visit and look around (17.5%); others attend congregational worship (14.0%); yet others attend ceremonies (6.1%) or pray privately (3.5%) (Table 5.22). Many of these Chinese religionists who have been to churches are young teenagers or adults who follow their friends in order to discover what Christianity is about, and they form a target group for proselytisation.

Aside from churches, the other religious place that Chinese religionists have had most contact with is the Hindu temple, with 17.5% of the respondents having been into one, primarily for private prayers (9.2%) or simply to visit (17.5%). Many of these are older devotees whose conceptions of deities and religions seem to be less exclusionary. For example, Mr Tan, a 66-year old traditional Chinese religionist, told me that he had been to a Hindu temple because the god was reputed to be "efficacious" in answering prayers and granting requests. This is an indication of how the deities of other religions can quite easily be co-opted into the Chinese pantheon. It accords with Wee's (1976:173) view, highlighted in Chapter Three, that "shenists" have the habit of taking over deities of other religions by treating them as shen. Apart from churches and Hindu temples, few Chinese religionists have been into mosques (1.8%) or Sikh temples (0.4%). In all, 50.4% of the Chinese religionist sample has not been into any other religious place aside from the Chinese temple (Table 5.19).

Generally, a significant proportion of Catholics have not ventured into other religious places, with 56.9% never having been into a mosque or temple (Table 5.19).

Table 5.22: Chinese religionists: Nature of contact with mosques, churches and temples

Activity	Mosque	Church	Hindu temple	Chinese temple	Sikh temple
Visit	1.8% (4)	17.5% (40)	7.0% (16)	61.8% (141)	- (-)
Attend ceremony	- (-)	6.1% (14)	1.3% (3)	11.0% (25)	- (-)
Congregational worship	- (-)	14.0% (32)	0.9% (2)	- (-)	- (-)
Private prayers	- (-)	3.5% (8)	9.2% (21)	81.6% (186)	0.4% (1)

Note: Total number of Chinese religionist respondents = 228.

For those who have advanced beyond churches, the Chinese temple is the most visited religious place, with 34.5% having ever been into one: 17.2% have visited; 13.8% have attended ceremonies, and 8.6% have been to pray privately (Table 5.23). Of the 20 respondents who have been into Chinese temples, only nine were converts from Chinese religion who had been into the temples before conversion. The rest had been into Chinese temples as Catholics. Often this happens because as Karen, a devout Catholic indicated, there is a "curiosity" about other religious places. At the same time, Catholics have relatives who are non-Catholics and they participate in certain ceremonies (such as funeral rites and memorial services) which are conducted in temples. Aside from the Chinese temple, some Catholics have also been into mosques (13.8%), Hindu temples (17.2%) and Sikh temples (3.4%) (Table 5.19). Most of these respondents have gone to visit, and only a small minority to attend ceremonies (Table 5.23).

Next to the Hindus, "Other Christians" have the lowest percentage of respondents who have not been into other religious places. The figure (34.2%) is however a far cry from the Hindus' 4.7% (Table 5.19). For those who have visited other places, the Chinese temple is again the religious place they have had the most common contact with. In this instance, however, a large proportion (30 or 69.8%) of the 43 respondents who have been into Chinese temples are converts from Chinese religion who had been into temples before their conversion, and they had gone primarily for private prayers (30.1%) or to attend ceremonies (17.8%) (Table 5.24). About a third (30.2%) of the respondents who have been into Chinese temples are non-converts who have visited Chinese temples for cultural, architectural and historical reasons. Aside from Chinese temples, "Other Christians" have little contact with other religious places. Only 5.5% have visited mosques, and 8.2% have been into Hindu temples. None has ever been into a Sikh temple.

Table 5.23: Catholics: Nature of contact with mosques, churches and temples

Activity	Mosque	Church	Hindu temple	Chinese temple	Sikh temple
Visit	12.1% (7)	67.2% (39)	17.2% (10)	17.2% (10)	1.7% (1)
Attend ceremony	1.7% (1)	22.4% (13)	10.3% (6)	13.8% (8)	1.7% (1)
Congrega-tional worship	- (-)	89.7% (52)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
Private prayers	- (-)	51.7% (30)	- (-)	8.6% (5)	- (-)

Note: Total number of Catholic respondents = 58.

Table 5.24: "Other Christians": Nature of contact with mosques, churches and temples

Activity	Mosque	Church	Hindu temple	Chinese temple	Sikh temple
Visit	5.5% (4)	30.1% (22)	8.2% (6)	11.0% (8)	- (-)
Attend ceremony	- (-)	23.3% (17)	1.4% (1)	17.8% (13)	- (-)
Congregational worship	- (-)	93.2% (68)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)
Private prayers	- (-)	45.2% (33)	- (-)	30.1% (22)	- (-)

Note: Total number of "Other Christian" respondents = 73.

Even while "Other Christians" have a relatively low percentage of respondents who have not been into other religious places, it is also true that those who do visit them still feel a divide between their own and other religions, a divide which is reflected in physical terms. Anne, a devout and active Christian, born into a Methodist family and raised in a Methodist school, has had little contact with other religions in other than a cursory fashion. When she first entered a mosque, she felt confined to a corner for fear that through her actions, she might be "crossing some threshold" or that she might be doing something wrong. The barriers to her physical mobility in this sense reflect the limits in a wider sense, and in particular, the lack of understanding of other religions. This lack of understanding is also evident in the fear and uneasiness some people feel when going to other religious places. For example, Joan, a born Catholic raised in a Catholic school, feels a sense of eeriness and foreboding when entering Chinese temples.

To sum up, this section has explored in a preliminary way the extent to which individuals have crossed the religious divides, at least physically, by advancing into the religious spaces of groups other than their own. Notwithstanding the multi-religious setting, religious places in Singapore have remained fairly exclusive to their respective religious adherents. Within this general scenario, there are a few notable exceptions where there is some bridging of the gulfs. The main divides crossed appear to be between Hindus and Christians, between Christians and Chinese religionists, and between Chinese religionists and Hindus, with the Hindus emerging as the group which is most open and diverse in their religious destinations.

While having first hand experience of other religious places is certainly not the only way in which to find out about the extent of inter-religious mixing or even understanding, it is nonetheless a useful index in four ways. At a religious level, it

suggests the way in which the god(s) of one group may be "adopted" by adherents of another group. At a cultural and historical level, it is an indication of the extent of awareness of Singapore's cultural and architectural heritage. At a social level, it reveals the degree of interaction between adherents of various religious groups; and at a political level, it is an indicator of the degree to which some religions are more open and inclusionary while others tend to be more inward-looking and exclusionary.

5.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter by introducing the metaphor of "religious circuit" and identifying the various components of such a circuit. In section 5.2, I illustrated the major hubs along these circuits, namely churches, temples and mosques, on the one hand, and houses, on the other. On this basis, I devoted the rest of the chapter to an analysis of the interactions and relationships between people and churches, temples, and mosques, leaving houses as places of worship for Chapter Seven. In section 5.3, I discussed the overt, public levels at which people interact with their religious places: how often they go, where they go, and why. This led to the discussion in section 5.4 of the latent, private levels of meanings and values invested in religious places. In the following four sub-sections, I illustrated that there is no one single meaning for each place. Instead, religious places are multivalent in that they embody a variety of meanings. They are sacred places where one's god(s) may be found and where one may go through a divine experience. They are also "sacred" places because of the secular bonds to the place borne of personal attachments and experiences. They are centres of social interaction, and they are symbols of the interactions and divisions between individuals of different religious groups in a multi-religious country.

I have concentrated fully in this chapter on individual experience, placing human beings at the centre of my argument, in line with humanistic thinking. However, as I have pointed out in Chapter Two, such a perspective alone is inadequate. The meanings I have discussed are to a large extent, apolitical and context-free. To rectify this picture and develop my argument, there are two other major inter-related issues I will need to address. The first is the wider context and the socio-political constraints within which individuals exist. This context will form the focus of my next chapter. The second is the negotiation and adaptation of meanings -- and by association, their dynamism and mutability -- which occurs as devotees set about coping with the given context and constraints. These meanings are a development of those I have discussed in this chapter, and will form the nexus between constraints and individual meanings. Chapter Seven will deal with this issue.

CHAPTER SIX

THE "POWER OF OTHERS": UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE STATE

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the wider socio-political context in which religious lives are set. This is because individuals do not exist in a vacuum, and relationships and experiences with religious places are in fact formed and negotiated within the constraints set by the wider milieu. Here, I will argue that the state in Singapore plays a significant role in influencing context and hence shaping the constraints to the construction of meanings. In other words, I will show that individuals who relate to and interact with their religious places are not totally free to invest their meanings and values as they wish because there are others with the power to shape the context and constraints. To illustrate this "power of others" (Eyles, 1988a), I will concentrate in this chapter on explicating the state-religion nexus in Singapore.

Specifically, the chapter will be divided into six sections. In section 6.2, I will examine the state's position with regards to religion by highlighting the state's secular policy and the corresponding principles of freedom of worship; multi-culturalism and equality of treatment; and a strict separation of religion and politics. In addition, I will discuss the state's policy regarding the position of Muslims, casting it within its historical and geographical context. With this as a general background, I will go on in section 6.3 to outline specific state policies and actions towards religious buildings. Here, the discussion will be kept at the level of material provisions and I will argue that from a functionalist perspective, these policies contribute towards providing an

"efficient", "orderly" urban setting in which the various needs of the population (such as housing, schools, hospitals and so forth) are met. In section 6.4, I will then argue that beyond this material level, the state makes symbolic use of religious buildings. In particular, these buildings have the symbolic role of endorsing state rhetoric about support for religion, freedom of worship, multi-culturalism, equality of treatment and religious tolerance. This symbolic role, as I will proceed to argue in section 6.5, is a political one because it reflects an attempt to ensure that members of religious groups are not alienated from the state. Indeed, it reflects an attempt to garner political support from such religious individuals, so that the state will have continued political power to put to practice its policies for what it sees to be the general good of the country. As I will go on to illustrate in the same section, the state does in fact have this power to a large extent. By simply concentrating on the state's roles in influencing religious places, I will show how it has exercised this power, and then sought to secure social consensus by persuading Singaporeans that its policies and actions towards religious buildings, and its rationale for such policies and actions, are "natural" forms of "common-sense", as well as the only path of "rationality". In section 6.6, I will turn my attention to one particular issue in the state-religion nexus: the contradiction between the general principle of multi-culturalism and equality of treatment on the one hand, and the special position accorded to Muslims, on the other. Specific policies pertaining to mosques will be cited to illustrate this special position of the Muslims. The question of political costs and benefits will then be thrown open for further discussion in Chapter Seven. Finally, in section 6.7, I will summarise the main thrust of this chapter and set the scene for the next.

Before launching into section 6.2, it is necessary to define my usage of the term "state". A vast body of literature exists on the "state", and insofar as this chapter aims to focus on the state's conceptions of religious places and its role in influencing

religious places, my use of the concept vis-a-vis related ones (such as government, bureaucracy, state apparatus and state institutions) needs to be clarified. The "state" has been defined as a supreme, central power which exercises rule over a people (Hall, 1984:14), and which is responsible for the protection and maintenance of society (Dear, 1986:456). It stands for a set of institutions, including the government (the executive), the legislature (parliament), the bureaucracy, the judiciary, police and armed forces (Miliband, 1969;46; Dear, 1986:456-7). Together, these institutions form the state apparatus (Clark and Dear, 1984).

In the following discussions, I use the term "state" to refer to the supreme, central power which rules over the people of Singapore, and which comprises the set of institutions listed above. Of specific interest here is the government, made up of democratically elected representatives. In Singapore, the government consists of one ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP) which has an overwhelming majority in Parliament (80 out of 81 seats).[1] Within this government, the Cabinet (either independently or on the advice of senior civil servants) identifies the policy needs in Singapore, thus constituting the chief policy formulating body of the state (Chan,

[1] This does not include the one non-constituency member of Parliament (NCMP), Mr Lee Siew Choh. The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore provides for up to three NCMPs to be elected. They are chosen from losing candidates who secure the highest number of votes in a general election. They can speak and vote on all matters except a motion pertaining to a bill to amend the Constitution, a money bill as defined under Article 68, a supply bill or supplementary supply bill, and a vote of no confidence in the government (Pillai and Tan, 1989:663). In addition, there are also two non-elected MPs, Mr Leong Chee Whye and Associate Professor Maurice Choo, officially termed "Nominated Members of Parliament" (NMPs). The Constitution allows for up to six NMPs to be appointed, and defines their roles: they can participate in Parliamentary debates and vote on all issues except money Bills and constitutional matters. They are nominated by the public following certain criteria, and are selected by a special Select Committee comprising MPs and Cabinet Ministers (Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, 24 November 1990).

1985:75). Another directly relevant institution in my discussion is the bureaucracy,[2] in particular, two of the statutory boards, Housing and Development Board (HDB) and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA)). Both have significant roles to play in implementing many state policies of interest here.

By treating the "state" as a central power which is engaged in policy-making and implementation, and which invests political significance in religious buildings, it may appear that a certain degree of abstraction and reification is involved. However, I will stress that the state is realised through the real apparatuses (or institutions) of the state machinery (Hall, 1984:19), and these institutions in turn comprise real people who run the machinery. On the other hand, I would also emphasise that at all times, the focus is on the institutions and the public offices rather than the office-holders. Although officers may come and go, the office/authority of the state continues (Hall, 1984:19). Hence, when reference is made to public speeches and interviews by politicians, they are quoted in their capacity as public office-holders (for example, Ministers and Members of Parliament), and not as individuals. The views they express are held to be the views of the government and the state. What I will not be exploring are the private views of office-holders and how these may influence public actions. That connection between personal beliefs and motivations on the one hand, and public actions, on the other, will be left for further exploration in other studies.

6.2 State policies towards religion: general principles

In this section, I will introduce the context by discussing the secular position

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[2] The bureaucracy in Singapore is composed of the Singapore Civil Service and a range of statutory boards.

adopted by the state, focusing on four specific tenets which form the cornerstones of this secular policy. These are: the absence of an official state religion; freedom of worship; a commitment to multi-culturalism; and the separation of religion and politics. In addition, I will also highlight the contrary policy which accords a special position to the Muslims and examine briefly its roots in the 1950s.

First, Singapore is a secular state in the sense that no one religion is identified as the official state religion, unlike Malaysia, for example, where Islam is officially declared the state religion. In Singapore, all the major world religions are represented and so the state argues that "to accommodate such totally different spiritual and moral beliefs among the people without being torn apart, Singapore must be a strictly secular state" (Ho, 1990:2). This "secularism" in no way implies that there is official dis-interest in religion (Siddique, 1989:565), nor does it imply that the state is anti-religion per se. In fact, the state allows for freedom of worship, and Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (henceforth, the "Constitution") set out the rights of individuals and groups with respect to such freedom. Specifically, every person has the right to profess and practise his or her religion and to propagate it. Every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs; to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law. Every religious group also has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children and to provide instruction in its own religion, but there must be no discrimination on the grounds of religion only, in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law.

Closely related to the principle of freedom of worship is that of multi-culturalism. The state is committed to all cultural groups and in this instance, all

religious groups, without prejudice to any group in particular, whether they are majority or minority groups.[3] This is enshrined in the Constitution in two ways. First, a general clause protects the fundamental rights of the individual and citizen and prohibits discrimination by race, language or religion (Article 12). Second, the Presidential Council for Minority Rights established under Article 69 has the general function of considering and reporting on matters affecting persons of any racial or religious community in Singapore referred by Parliament or the government. In particular, the Council's function is to draw attention to any bill or subsidiary legislation if it is, in the opinion of the Council, a differentiating measure.

Apart from the absence of an official state religion and the emphasis on freedom of worship and multi-culturalism, a fourth tenet of the state's secular policy is the view that religion and politics must be kept strictly separate. Religious groups should not venture into politics and political parties should not use religious sentiments to gather popular support. If members of religious groups are to participate in the democratic political process, they must do so as individuals or members of political parties and not as leaders of religious groups. In this, the former Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew has been most emphatic that religious groups should look after the spiritual, moral and social well-being of its followers but should leave the economic and political needs of people to non-religious groups like political parties (13 December 1988). The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, passed in November

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[3] Various versions of this concept have been discussed by sociologists. For example, Benjamin (1976:115) discussed the concept of "multiracialism" in the context of Singapore as the "ideology that accords equal status to the cultures and ethnic identities of the various 'races' that are regarded as comprising the population of a plural society." Siddique (1989) discussed the "4Ms": multiracialism, multilingualism, multiculturalism and multireligiosity. To her, multireligiosity "acknowledges a societal situation in which a number of religions are practised, but none is officially recognized as paramount". It is distinguished by a "religious populism supportive of moral order" (Siddique, 1989:565).

1990, is designed to define behaviour that is acceptable as opposed to that which is not. Specifically, the Bill allows the relevant Minister to issue prohibition orders should any individual engage in any of four categories of harmful conduct. These are where a person causes feelings of enmity or hatred between different religious groups; if, under the guise of religion or propagating religious activity, one carries out political activities for promoting a political cause or the cause of any political party; carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagation of religion; and instigating and provoking feelings of disloyalty or hatred against the President or the government.

However, despite the general secular position and despite the specific stance of multi-culturalism, the state also recognises the special position of the Malays, and relatedly, the Muslims in Singapore. Article 152 of the Constitution focuses on minorities and in particular, on Malays in Singapore. It spells out clearly that the government must care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities in Singapore and in particular,

> to recognise the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore, and accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the Government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language (The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, 1985:73).

This consideration for the Malays is a legacy of the politics of the 1950s. Specifically, in the negotiations for the coalition government of 1959, one of the agreed conditions was that the Malays, as the indigenous population, should have special rights, which would be enshrined in the Constitution. It could also be an acknowledgement of geopolitical realities, that is, Singapore's position in Southeast Asia, a predominantly Malay world. Recognising that the Malays are the indigenous population and according them a special position could help to avert any suspicions on the part of

Singapore's neighbours that it is trying to be a "Third China" (Chua, 1983:38).

6.3 The state and religious buildings: material provisions

In this section, I will discuss state policies pertaining to religious buildings, which include policies affecting the establishment, demolition, relocation and conservation of churches, temples and mosques. In the course of this discussion, it will become evident that the three characteristics of land use policy in Singapore which I discussed in Chapter Three are reflected in policies pertaining to religious buildings. The first of these is that "efficiency", "pragmatism" and "orderly growth" form the guiding principles in land use planning. The second is that arising from such principles, urban renewal has generally emphasised demolition and reconstruction rather than conservation. The third is that a top-down approach has generally been taken towards planning and decision-making.

I will deal first with the establishment of religious buildings, which will be divided into a discussion of the establishment of new churches, temples and mosques, and an examination of policies pertaining to the change of use from existing secular buildings. In the establishment of new religious buildings, the state specifically sets aside parcels of land for tender by religious groups. These parcels of land are usually found in the new towns built by the HDB on the basis of the neighbourhood principle, adapted from British and European town planning practices. The basic planning philosophy is maximum self-sufficiency in the satisfaction of basic community needs and so within each neighbourhood, there will be shopping facilities, community centres, recreation facilities, schools, medical care and the like to cater to the needs of residents. If there are more than three neighbourhoods close together, then a town or

district centre will be built to provide higher order goods and services, such as banks, theatres, cinemas and departmental stores (Teh, 1969:175; Drakakis-Smith & Yeung, 1977:6). In the light of such considerations, it is clear that a strongly modernist stance is adopted in town planning in which the successful formula is based on efficiency and functionalism (Ley, 1989:47-51). The description of "good" town planning, as outlined in a 1923 article "Reasons for Town Planning" would apply well in the context of Singapore: "Good city planning is not primarily a matter of aesthetics, but of economics. Its basic principle is to increase the working efficiency of the city" (quoted in Ley, 1989:50).

In such a context, religious building sites are provided in the new towns as another amenity which sections of the population require. Precise planning standards guiding the minimum provision of such sites are drawn up as they are for other amenities (Table 6.1). For churches, mosques and Chinese temples, these guidelines are made on a new town basis. For example, for every 12000 dwelling units in a new town, a church site will be set aside; and for every 9000 dwelling units in a new town, a Chinese temple site will be designated. However, Hindu temple sites are made on a regional basis because it takes two or three new towns to make up 90000 dwelling units. Factors taken into consideration when drawing up these guidelines include "demographic characteristics", "religious habits", as well as space requirements and architectural design for the different religious groups (Correspondence with Strategic Planning Branch, URA; and Systems and Research Department, HDB). These planning standards are reviewed periodically in the light of demographic and social changes. The precise sites are usually proposed by the HDB and submitted for consideration to the Master Plan Committee and approval of the Ministry of National Development.

Table 6.1: Planning standards for the provision of religious sites

Religious building	Approx. site area	Planning standard
Church	3000 m^2 to 4500 m^2	1 to 12000 du
Chinese temple	2000 m^2 to 3000 m^2	1 to 9000 du
Mosque	2500 m^2	1 to 20000 du
Hindu temple	1800 m^2 to 2500 m^2	1 to 90000 du

du : dwelling unit

Source:Systems and Research Department
Housing and Development Board

Each parcel of land is only open for tender to each particular religious group. Hence, a site for churches, for example, is open for tendering by the various Christian denominations but Muslims, Hindus and Chinese religionists cannot make a bid for it. The Muslims however do not have to tender for this first mosque site because it is a policy to have one mosque in every new town developed[4] (Press Statement from Prime Minister's Office, 3 October 1987). A site is therefore allocated to MUIS at a price determined by the Chief Valuer. This is usually three to four times lower than the market value (Press statement from Prime Minister's Office, 3 October 1987).

While this general policy of ensuring that the minimum requirement of every religious group is met has prevented competition among religious groups, it has had a significant impact on Christian groups in particular, because there are more denominations seeking to set up their own church buildings than there are available sites. In the main, there have been two consequences. The first is that church groups have become locked in fierce competition in tendering for land. This led the first vice-president of the National Council of Churches of Singapore to call on its members to "repent" and improve ecumenical relationships (Straits Times, 29 July 1984). Second, it has actually led to some ecumenical co-operation, seen in two examples. The Yishun Christian Church houses both the Anglican and Lutheran congregations who, in response to land scarcity and high construction costs, came together to construct the shared church building. The Mount Carmel Bible Presbyterian and the independent Bible Church have also shared the cost of the Clementi Bible Centre, and run it jointly (Straits Times, 9 June 1985).

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[4] This is the normal provision for mosque sites while the earlier stated figure of one mosque site per new town where the Malay population is 20000 or more is a planning standard to guide the provision of such sites. They are therefore not necessarily inconsistent (Correspondence with Strategic Planning Branch, Urban Redevelopment Authority).

Besides sites earmarked in each new town to meet the identified needs of the major religious groups, additional sites may also be designated by the HDB after the minimum requirements outlined in Table 6.1 are met. Such sites are open to all religious groups to tender (Correspondence with Estates and Lands Division, HDB), which means religious groups may bid against each other. Since 1979, the URA in its "sale of sites" programme, has also periodically offered sites for development of religious and association buildings. Should a situation arise where sites set aside for religious purposes have all been allocated and other groups still require land, there are two courses of action. First, the private sector can propose religious development on privately-owned land for the consideration of the planning authority. Alternatively, the HDB and the URA can be approached for further sites.

Apart from the establishment of new religious buildings, religious groups may also try to convert existing buildings from secular to religious use. The state may also influence this process. It has direct control over the use to which existing buildings are put. For example, HDB flats are strictly for residential purposes only and those who use flats for regular religious purposes are contravening regulations. Enforcement action amounting to eviction will then have to be taken (Personal communication, Public Relations Department, HDB, 5 February 1990).[5] In such situations, there is no possibility whatever of a change in use. However, in other situations, applications can be made to the Development Control Division (DCD) of the URA for permission to change the use of land/buildings. The powers conferred by the Planning (Development) Rules, 1981, require that all plans for change of use be approved by

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[5] However, as the HDB itself acknowledges, it is sometimes difficult to define precisely what constitutes using the flats for "regular religious purposes". It is also difficult to monitor the situation and so, unless neighbours complain of noise, for example, it is entirely possible that the Board may have no knowledge of contravention.

the DCD. Whether a building can be converted from secular to religious use would depend on several considerations, such as the location of the building, whether the area is a predominantly residential area, if too much traffic is going to be generated as a result of conversion to religious use, if there are going to be parking facilities near by and other such practical considerations (Personal communication, DCD, URA, 5 February 1990). In recent years, churches in search of a home have successfully managed to obtain approval for converting old disused cinemas. For example, Fairfield Methodist Church is housed in what was previously Metropole Cinema while the Church of Our Saviour is housed in the old Venus Cinema.

Just as the state has a role to play in the establishment of religious buildings, it also has a role in their relocation and demolition. There are two situations when relocation and/or demolition takes place. The first is if they are unauthorised structures; the second, more commonly, is when they are affected by public schemes. Specifically, a policy statement was made in 1973 which asserted that "as people move out from old areas to be redeveloped, temples, mosques or churches will have to give way to urban renewal or new development, unless they are of historical and architectural value" (Press Statement, 25 November 1973). The stand taken is that religious buildings will be treated as any other buildings which may come in the way of development. This was clearly spelt out in a statement by Dr Tan Eng Liang (the then Senior Minister of State for National Development), who declared: "The resettlement policy is clear-cut, irrespective of religions, irrespective of owners and irrespective of organisations" (Parliamentary Debates, 16 March 1978, col. 978). In putting this policy into practice, the government has acquired and cleared 23 mosques, 76 suraus, 700 Chinese temples, 27 Hindu temples and 19 churches for public development schemes between 1974 and 1987 (Press statement from Prime Minister's Office, 3 October 1987).

Religious groups to be resettled are offered alternative sites by the policy implementing agencies (usually the URA, HDB and the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC)). However, such alternative sites are not offered on a one-to-one basis:

> It is not possible to have a temple for temple, a mosque for mosque, a church for church substitution. This is uneconomic, impractical and, in the limited land space of Singapore, impossible (Press Statement, 25 November 1973).

In fact, religious buildings affected by clearance are primarily allocated land on a joint basis. In other words, one site is made available to two or more existing buildings of the same religion. This is the most common recourse for groups affected. In one instance, as many as eight Chinese temples were affected by clearance and because each could not afford a new place, all eight groups came together to build one temple (in Tampines Street 21) to rehouse them all. Although they were under one roof, each group was able to retain its own activities and celebrations because the individual gods had their own birthdays and special celebrations (Straits Times, 8 July 1986). This can be compared to the ecumenical co-operation between different church groups discussed above.

However, in exceptional circumstances, a building site may be offered for the exclusive use of a single religious building to be demolished. In such an instance, prices of land will be determined by the land valuer in accordance with prevailing market rates (Straits Times, 11 November 1977). This happened, for example, with the construction of a new Central Sikh Temple, because the government recognised that it was the main Sikh temple for the entire community in Singapore.

In some instances, the lease may have run out for the religious site just as redevelopment is about to take place. In such instances, the lease will not be

extended, and those affected may not be allocated land. They will then have to tender and pay market value for sites set aside by the HDB for religious use, or sites put up for sale to religious groups and associations by the URA. This has caused some smaller religious buildings to close down completely because they could not find suitable alternative sites or because they could not afford the cost of new sites (Straits Times, 15 June 1979).

In some situations, the religious building may be deemed to be of historical and architectural value and instead of demolition or relocation, they are gazetted as a national monument for preservation. This is decided by the Preservation of Monuments Board, a body set up by Parliament in 1971 "to preserve monuments of historic, traditional, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest; to protect and augment the amenities of those monuments; to stimulate public interest and support in the preservation of those monuments and to take appropriate measures to preserve all records, documents and data relating to those monuments" (Preservation of Monuments Act, 1985). The Board consists of members appointed by the Minister for National Development. To date, sixteen religious buildings have been designated as national monuments and preserved[6].

To sum up, I have shown in this section that at the material level, the state clearly plays a large role in deciding how space is to be used for religious purposes. I have discussed this in the context of the establishment, relocation, demolition and preservation of religious buildings. From a functionalist perspective, these policies are

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[6] These are Sultan Mosque, Abdul Gaffoor Mosque, Al-Abrar Mosque, Hajjah Fatimah Mosque, Jamae Mosque, Nagore Durgha, Sri Mariamman Temple, Sri Perumal Temple, Siong Lim Temple, Hong San See, Tan Si Chong Su Temple, Thian Hock Keng, Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, St Andrew's Cathedral, St George's Church and the Armenian Church.

a reflection of the state's commitment to providing an "efficient", "orderly" system in which the various needs of the population are taken care of, ranging from the provision of housing to schools, public recreational facilities and so forth. It is in this context that places of worship feature in the planning framework. In other words, in the rationalisation of land use patterns, the provision of sites reflects a "pragmatic" planning decision to cater to the religious needs of the people. At the same time, the demolition and relocation of religious buildings to make way for public projects is a reflection of how pragmatism, efficiency and orderliness are emphasised over other values, such as the sacred meanings which adherents invest in religious places. Only rarely, and only in recent years, have alternative values such as historical significance and architectural merit been recognised.

6.4 Endorsing the rhetorics: symbolic roles of material buildings

Beyond the purely material level, there are two levels at which religious buildings may have symbolic meanings invested in them by the state. At one level, the material provisions for religious buildings endorse political rhetoric about support for religion and equality of treatment. This will be my focus in this section. At another level, the policies reflect the exercise of political power and ideological hegemony, which I will deal with in section 6.5.

The Community Development Minister, Mr Wong Kan Seng, has stressed the idea that the state does not ascribe meanings to places, including religious places; indeed, he has argued it is not for the state to do so. What the state does is set aside land for religious use but it is the community that then invests meanings in these places (Personal interview, 5 April 1990). However, I would suggest that the very

ways in which the state formulates its policies pertaining to religious buildings are indicative of the underlying symbolic meanings and values ascribed to them by the state. These policies also indicate values the state wants Singaporeans to imbibe and adopt as their own. In this sense, religious places are not neutral backdrops to the unfolding human action. Neither are the provision, demolition and preservation of religious sites purely material actions; they are politically symbolic ones as well. In this section, I will discuss how some of the state's policies have been used to endorse state rhetoric on four counts, namely, as evidence of the state's support for religion, freedom of worship, commitment to multi-culturalism and relatedly, equality of treatment, as well as religious tolerance and harmony.

First, the policies and actions act as concrete evidence of state support for religion. They allow the state to claim it recognises and values the role of religion in Singapore. This was spelt out very clearly by Mr Lee Yiok Seng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of National Development (30 July 1988) who claimed that

> The importance which our Government places on religion is reflected .... in the nature of the physical development that is taking place today in Singapore. In the development of HDB new towns, our planners make provisions for places of worship.

Even the occasional preservation of religious places is used by state representatives to illustrate the state's support for religion. As Mr Lee Yiok Seng continued,

> In other areas and where the planned development or redevelopment allows, efforts are also made to conserve particular temples, mosques and churches. Some of the places of worship which have special historic significance are also designated as national monuments.

This claim of state support for religion reinforces public rhetoric about the

importance of religion in Singapore society. In all public discourses, representatives of the state are careful not to appear anti-religious; indeed, they take every opportunity to show their support for religion. For example, ministers and members of Parliament in their public appearances often speak of the "strong and positive influence" of religion, how it adds to the "moral fibre" of society (Othman Wok, 3 November 1974), and how it is "one of those factors that enables the total development of a person as an individual and as a member of the family and the community" (Lee Yiok Seng, 30 July 1988).

Second, the state is able to claim a commitment to allow freedom of worship in Singapore by pointing to the abundance of varied religious buildings. As Mr Goh Chok Tong took pains to point out,

> Those who criticise us by saying there is no freedom in Singapore are talking nonsense ... I can think of only one other place in the world where you can see a mosque, a church and a temple in the same constituency (Straits Times, 3 December 1984).

He goes on to cite the case of Yugoslavia where there is a large Muslim population and not enough places of worship. On the other hand, in Singapore, there are fewer Muslims but many more mosques. Similarly, the role of the built form was recognised by Mr Ho Kah Leong, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Communications and Information (17 April 1987), when he spoke of religious buildings as "reminder(s) and ... symbol(s) of freedom of religion and worship in our multi-religious Republic."

Such symbolic use of religious buildings allows the state to substantiate in a tangible way the constitutional rights accorded to individuals and religious groups to freedom of worship, specifically outlined in Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution. The same argument is reinforced through other channels, such as the mass media. For

example, one editorial in a local newspaper commented on the state's role in encouraging and supporting religion through its material provisions:

> The different religious groups worship freely. To an extent, in Singapore, they are encouraged by the government which sets aside a certain amount of land in each Housing and Development Board estate for churches, temples and mosques (Business Times, 12 May 1987).

A third way in which material provisions play a politically symbolic role is when they allow the state to claim a genuine commitment to multi-culturalism and equality of treatment of all groups. This is possible since some space is provided for all religious groups in planning guidelines and no group is denied at least some space. At the same time, resettlement and demolition policies also apply to all religious groups -- churches, mosques, Hindu and Chinese temples have all been affected -- and so the state can hedge itself against potential accusations that it has not been fair in its treatment of different groups. Two public statements can be cited to illustrate such symbolic use made of religious buildings. For example, Mr Rohan bin Kamis (then Member of Parliament for Telok Blangah), suggested that

> Singapore ... must be the only Government in the world which although secular has supported in concrete terms the aspirations of the Muslims in Singapore to build their own mosques ... this speaks well and clearly demonstrates to the world that the Singapore Government promotes a plural society (Parliamentary Debates, 19 March 1984, col. 1301).

A Muslim ex-Minister also emphasised that provisions are made for every group within new towns and all groups are similarly affected by demolition and relocation, to drive home the point that the state is fair in its treatment of all groups (Othman Wok, 25 October 1974). In a statement from the Prime Minister's Office (Press statement, 3 October 1987), it was also clearly spelt out that the state is even-handed in all its dealings with religious groups. In the case of land clearance for the Mass Rapid Transit stations in the Orchard Road corridor, a variety of religious buildings

were similarly affected, including Angullia Mosque, Ngee Ann Kongsi land, Bethesda Chapel, Chek Sian Teng Chinese Temple, Sri Sivan Temple, and a Sikh temple at Kirk Terrace. In short, even in the relocation and demolition of religious buildings, the state puts to practice its equality of treatment principle. Such specific policies and actions help to bear out the state's claim of commitment to multi-culturalism, and give substance to broader constitutional provisions which protect the citizen against discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth.

A fourth way in which the state invests political meanings in religious buildings is when it holds them up as symbols of religious "tolerance" and "acceptance". For example, the then President H.B. Sheares (30 October 1972) commented: "many of our oldest buildings are places of worship and they stand as monuments of the generations of tolerance which have gone to making up our way of life". Such statements illustrate the symbolic use made of religious places to exhort Singaporeans to religious tolerance and acceptance.

In brief, through its various policies, actions and public rhetoric, not least those pertaining to religious buildings, the state is able to illustrate its support for religion, its commitment to freedom of worship, multi-culturalism, and equality of treatment. From the perspective of the religious groups, this is positive and augurs well for their continued existence and growth. However, beyond this symbolic role of endorsing public rhetoric and of persuading people there is a genuine support for religion and commitment to multi-culturalism, another level of symbolic reading is possible. To get to this interpretation which centres on notions of political power and ideological hegemony, it is necessary to get beneath the "ideological sediment" (Barthes, quoted in Duncan and Duncan, 1988). In the next section, I shall deal specifically with these themes.

6.5 Beyond rhetorics: political power through ideological hegemony

In this section, my discussion will focus on a further interpretation of the symbolic meanings of religious buildings in Singapore beyond both the material and the public rhetorical levels. The state believes its policies are the best for all members of society. Members of government therefore seek to attain and maintain popular support and political power, so that policies can be implemented with minimal resistance. To do so, the state cannot afford to alienate any social group, including religious groups. I will illustrate below how the state seeks political support from religious groups and individuals by being ideologically hegemonic, so that it has the power to shape social lives. Second, I will also show how the state has the power to influence people's private lives, specifically religious lives, through its policies and actions. It then seeks to persuade people that these policies and actions are the most natural and common-sensical courses of action. In both these instances, I will illustrate how symbolic use is made of religious buildings to exercise such hegemony. In other words, I will argue that religious buildings play an ideological role in supporting a set of ideas and values, in this case the state's ideas and values. These buildings are therefore not neutral backdrops to human action (Duncan and Duncan, 1988:123).

First, as I illustrated in section 6.4, state policies and actions pertaining to religious places have been invoked to show that the state recognises and supports religion. At the same time, as I illustrated in section 6.3, from a functionalist perspective, the state and its planning agencies have tried to meet the various needs of people through the efficient provision of schools, recreational facilities, hospitals, housing, and places of worship. While this may be true, it is also possible that in formulating these policies, the state is at least as much guided by political interests

as it is by a genuine desire to support religion. At this level of interpretation, the state is careful not to alienate religious groups and individuals, and indeed attempts to garner political support from them by showing approval and support for religion. It has chosen two tangible ways of doing it: the provision of sites for religious use; and the preservation of selected religious buildings. The apparent contradiction between a state that declares itself to be secular and which proceeds to have a large say in the production and maintenance of religious landscapes can therefore be explained in part by reference to hegemonic intentions. In short, it is using the sacred to engender loyalty and trust to the secular state (Muir and Weissman, 1989). This parallels Lewandowski's (1984) discussion of Madras, in which the state and national governments created an urban landscape which not only met the needs of its contemporary citizens, but also contributed to its own political legitimation. For example, in Madras, the government portrayed itself as a protector of religious institutions and a patron of the arts. New buildings drew on classical architectural tradition and were named after local heroes. Statues were erected that honour classical Tamil language writers and contemporary Tamil poets, as well as local state and national leaders. Here was a conscious attempt to politicise culture and to manipulate it for the ends of the party in power and to gain popular support for its policies. Duncan's (1990) analysis of nineteenth century Kandy is another case in point. Whether it was the Asokan or Sakran discourse on kingship that was accepted, Duncan showed that religious landscapes could be used to endorse the political order. The Asokan discourse favoured the production of landscapes dominated by religious structures and public works for the benefit of the people and so a king who successfully created such a landscape gained political legitimacy. The Sakran discourse, on the other hand, favoured a landscape of palaces and cities modelled after the landscapes of gods. To an extent, a king's construction of such a landscape could gain him political legitimacy as well.

Second, the state enjoys a degree of political power which enables it to influence the private lives of religious individuals. Despite the rhetoric about freedom of worship, it could be argued that the state reserves enough power to define religious places, and at a larger level, religion itself. As section 6.3 illustrates, in the establishment of religious buildings, the state exercises control over where religious buildings go, how much space is to be given over to each, how many there are to be in each neighbourhood and so forth. Even building height restrictions are imposed, as correspondence with religious leaders involved in setting up new buildings testify. The most tangible and public manifestations of religious space -- churches, temples and mosques -- are to such a large extent defined by the state. It illustrates well the fact that "space is not <u>just</u> a value allocated by the government/market nexus, but also has the characteristics of a power resource" (Young, 1975:187-8), and that the power to shape religious landscapes is symbolic of the greater power to influence religious groups and individuals (Agnew and Duncan, 1989).

This power to define religious space is but one example of how the state has exercised its power. I will discuss three other examples here. The first is the setting up of MUIS; the second is the regulations surrounding public religious celebrations and processions; while the third is the way in which the state seeks to define religion's roles in Singapore. MUIS was set up as a statutory board, with a significant number of members appointed on the recommendation of the Minister.[7] This would appear incongruous in a secular state. In effect, the reasons for its existence are political (Kho, 1979/80). It allows Muslim religious affairs to become better organised

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[7] MUIS consists of a President appointed by the President of Singapore; the Mufti; not more than five members to be appointed by the President of Singapore on the recommendation of the Minister; and not less than seven members to be appointed by the President of Singapore, from a list of nominees to be submitted by the President of MUIS (Administration of Muslim Law Act, 1985).

and therefore less vulnerable to agitation by subversives. The existence of MUIS has the psychological effect of assuring Muslims that their affairs are being properly taken care of by the government, since there is now an official body liaising between the Muslims and the government. Finally, the government is not willing to give Islamic leaders a free reign because in the past, Muslim leaders had exploited religious issues and created trouble in Singapore. MUIS, with members appointed by the President of Singapore, now oversees Muslim activities.

The state has also set up a series of laws regarding public religious celebrations and processions. The Commissioner of Police, subject to the approval of the Minister, is charged with the responsibility of making general rules for the conduct of such assemblies and processions while the Deputy Commissioner of Police may, with the sanction of the Minister, prohibit any such activity (Minor Offences Act, 1985). Some of the general rules set down include, for example, the requirement that the promoters apply for a permit to be issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations) or the Administrative Officer of the Police Division in which the activity is to be held. The permit is granted under a variety of conditions. For instance, the route of a procession must be approved and there must be no deviation from it. The same specifications apply to the time permitted for processions and assemblies. There must be no singing or music, gongs, drums or music-producing equipment; public address systems; banners, posters or placards, unless authorised by the police officer issuing the permit. Should there be any circumstances in which it is deemed that the conditions of the permit have been breached or a breach of the peace is likely to occur, any police officer may order the dispersal of any assembly or procession (The Miscellaneous Offence (Public Order and Nuisance) (Assemblies and Processions) Rules, 1989). Any person who infringes the rules or holds (including presence at and assistance in) an assembly or procession in defiance of a prohibition by the

Deputy Commissioner of Police will be liable, on conviction, to a fine or imprisonment or both (Minor Offences Act, 1985). These controls over space, time and activity can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, they are necessary to ensure there is orderly behaviour and minimum disruption to other sectors of the population who are not part of the public assemblies or processions. On the other hand, they can also be interpreted as further examples of how the state reserves the power to define religious activity through controls over space, time and behaviour. If interpreted in this light, these controls are equivalent to Jackson's (1988) notion of "strategies of containment", which he discussed in the context of the policing of London's Notting Hill Carnival. Furthermore, by delimiting these crowd activities in very specific ways, they become "officially institutionalised mass activity" within a "controlled set of enclosed spheres", which is then neither "incomprehensible" nor "alarming" (Harrison, 1988:195). In these senses, the controls are no longer simply functional in intent, but strongly political as well.

That the state holds power is also evident in the way in which it seeks to define religion and its roles in the context of Singapore. In many public discourses, state leaders have sought to define religion as it "should be" in Singapore. For example, Mr S. Rajaratnam (21 March 1981) stated unequivocally that religion should not be "esoteric and spiritual" but "action oriented and relevant"; it should be concerned with worldly problems and it should help to cope with change. This is echoed by Mr S. Jayakumar (13 February 1982) and Encik Sidek Saniff (23 December 1985) who define religion as concerned with the "here and now", "linked to the practical" and not "merely the esoteric". Yet, while an action-oriented religion is encouraged, such social action is also defined within certain acceptable spheres. In the words of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (13 December 1988), religion looks after the "moral and social well-being" of a people but it should not be concerned

with the economic and political needs of the population. In concrete terms, religion should preferably demonstrate its practical value in certain ways in Singapore. Education such as that provided in Christian schools is acceptable, if only because of their emphasis on moral teachings (Lee Boon Yang, 26 April 1985). Homes for the aged and destitute, care for the poor and less fortunate, counselling for the "misguided" (such as drug addicts), and childcare services are other acceptable areas of activity for religious organisations. The clearest statement to this effect was articulated by Mr Lee Kuan Yew (Straits Times, 17 August 1987):

> What we want our religious and para-religious groups to do is to give relief to the destitute, the disadvantaged, the disabled, to take part in activities which will foster communal fellowship. Emphasis on charity, alms-giving and social and community work. ... And priests (had) better stay out of espousing a form of economic system, or challenge the way we do things, social policy or theory.

In brief, the state has power over religious groups and individuals, and this is apparent in two mutually reinforcing ways. First, it has attempted to define and delimit religion's roles. Second and relatedly, it has attempted to define and delimit religious use of space. This supports Anderson's (1987) argument that authorities have the power to define or legitimise definitions of identity and place. Specifically, in her study of Vancouver between the 1880s and 1920s, Anderson illustrated how the municipal authorities granted legitimacy to the ideas of "Chinese" and "Chinatown" by "inscribing social definitions of identity and place in institutional practice and space." In my context, the state not only legitimises definitions of religious roles and places, it also works to provide these very definitions and then persuades religious groups to abide by them.

In the rest of this section, I will go on to explore the arguments which the state employs to persuade people that their policies and actions are natural, common-

sensical and necessary. In particular, I will focus on the policies of relocating and demolishing religious buildings and examine the ways in which the state seeks to persuade Singaporeans of the necessity of such actions. First, the state maintains that "rational" and "pragmatic" decisions must be made for Singapore to progress, which in the present context, is translated as "economic" use of scarce land.[8] Hence, many areas in Singapore have undergone massive redevelopment, which more often than not, involves demolition of the old and construction of the new. Following the direction of such rationality, religious buildings have not been spared the bulldozer; much loved buildings have been knocked down to give way to Mass Rapid Transit stations, new housing projects and other symbols of modernisation and development. This process of urban change is presented as inevitable, as extracts from two speeches by Encik Othman Wok in 1974 (then Minister for Social Affairs) show:

> Progress in Singapore cannot be achieved without change. The numerous development schemes such as oil refinery, public housing, etc, have necessitated the re-siting of burial grounds and religious institutions. These have affected all sections of the community.
>
> It is not a deliberate policy of the Singapore Government to demolish places of worship. The process of urban renewal has necessitated the moving of population from one area to another. However, every effort has been made to ensure that the way of life of the people concerned is not adversely affected both economically and spiritually. In fact, the object of development is to upgrade the living standards of the population as a whole.
>
> In the process of development, the old must make way for the new and demolition of some masjids, temples and churches affected by redevelopment is inevitable. Such action has only been resorted to when absolutely necessary and unavoidable (Othman Wok, 17 July 1974).
>
> Development projects which are for the benefit of Singapore society as a whole must go on, and if any building is in the way of such development, obviously it will have to go if this is unavoidable (Othman Wok, 25 October 1974).

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[8] That "pragmatism" is closely linked to means of attaining economic growth in Singapore is well argued by Chua (1985).

While these arguments assume there is only one form of rationality in any given situation, rationality is in fact ultimately ideological. What the state has presented is one construction of rationality. There is an alternative position, one which begins with the premise that religion is important for a modern, fast-changing society because it provides a spiritual anchor and moral imperative. This has been recognised, for example, in Mr Ho Kah Leong's (then Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Communications and Information) statement that "(i)n our progressive but materialistic society, religion provides the much needed spiritual and moral support" (Straits Times, 19 June 1989). Extending from this, it is also true that religious institutions and buildings are important because they help people to focus on their religious lives and act as physical reminders of their faith in the bustle of urban living. Seen in this light, the rational option would be to keep these buildings particularly when they have a long shared history with the people. The fact that the first conception has been presented as the only rational and pragmatic option indicates that the state is seeking to persuade people its beliefs and actions are the only natural and common-sense way of doing things. In other words, it seeks to be ideologically hegemonic.

Second, even if the destruction of a religious building means some personal loss or if it affects one community in particular, Singaporeans are encouraged to think in terms of public and national interests and the overall good of the country. This reflects wider calls to Singaporeans to subordinate personal and sectional interests for the common good in order that multi-racial and multi-religious Singapore can enjoy successful community living (Othman Wok, 11 December 1971). For example, Mr Chan Chee Seng (25 May 1975), then Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs, spoke of how "religion can and must play a part to get people to think in terms of nation, rather than sectional interests" (see also Ahmad Mattar, 17 October 1977 and 13 November 1988). In real terms, two other examples will further illustrate

how such overall interests have over-ridden sectional interests. In the first instance, the Abortion Bill of 1969 liberalised abortion laws to allow for legalised abortion. This was done at a time when family planning and population control were primary goals on the state's agenda. Religious groups, particularly Christian and Muslim groups, objected, but nonetheless, the Bill was passed with few amendments. Second, at the height of the population control policies in the 1970s, the Ministry of Education gave priority in school enrolment for children whose parents were sterilised. Catholic schools protested that sterilisation went against their religious teachings, which meant that Catholic children were likely to be systematically discriminated against. The Minister, Mr Chai Chong Yii's replied to criticism by saying: "We have no intention to meddle with religious beliefs. But national policy should take precedence over other policies" (quoted in Kho, 1979/80:75).

Yet, while the "public interest" is often invoked speedily to counter any objections, there has been little discussion of what constitutes "public interest" and of who defines such interests. As Simmie (1974:121-125) argued in the context of urban planning, there is no such thing as <u>the</u> public interest. Rather, there are a number of different and competing interests, defined by different groups. In such a context, it is fallacious to pretend that "policy makers acting alone can determine and safeguard the 'public interest'" (Burgess and Gold, 1982:2). By contrast, as Vasil (1988:123-4) pointed out, the PAP's view is that in developing societies where there are many ethnic groups and economic classes, each has its own distinctive views of what the common interests are. As a result, there will be no "accepted consensus on the interests of the nation". Given this view, the PAP works on the premise that the government "alone (has) the legitimate right to represent the whole nation. Its perceptions of the national interest must prevail." It is such definitions of public interests, generally made with little consultation with the people who will be directly

affected, that the state invokes to persuade people to accept its actions.

Third, it could be argued that the state conflates religious and state ideals to persuade religious groups and individuals to support its demolition and relocation policies. Specifically, the state argues that the destruction of religious buildings is necessary for purposes of development and progress, and these are positive goals which religion encourages. Religious teachings are invoked to lend credence to the state's call for continued development of the country. The Minister-in-charge of Muslim affairs, Dr Ahmad Mattar (21 June 1987) and the then First Deputy Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong (24 August 1985), for example, have both said that Islam emphasises not just the spiritual well-being of its adherents, but material well-being as well. Many leaders have argued that the values which religions seek to impart to their adherents are the very same values which can propel a country on its road to development and progress (Rahim Ishak, 25 February 1979; Chin Harn Tong, 28 May 1988; Wong Kan Seng, 3 June 1985). The overall logic then, is that religion encourages material development and progress, and the values religions impart encourage such progress. Therefore, if in the pursuit of these laudable goals, religious buildings have to be demolished, then the ends will justify the means.

Finally, if all other arguments fail, the state attempts to persuade people that religious buildings are in themselves meaningless in order to justify their acts of demolition. This is illustrated, for example, in the following speech by Dr Ahmad Mattar (9 October 1977) who asserted that:

> Mosques like other buildings, are but an assemblage of bricks and concrete. For a mosque to become a spiritual household, warm and welcoming to those outside -- joyful, harmonious, loving and forgiving to all those inside, it should have life breathed into it through the congregation and their participation in the activities organised. Although all of us gathered here tonight admire the structure and design of this beautiful mosque, we must not forget that the spirit of

> worship does not lie in the building and design alone; it lies within our hearts. ... If we are steadfast in our faith and sincere in our thoughts, the physical setting and atmosphere are really not that important in drawing us near to God.

This quotation would seem to imply that those for whom the physical setting and atmosphere are important are really not steadfast in their faith nor sincere in their thoughts. This implication should perhaps be challenged. In my in-depth interviews with adherents of the various religious communities, it was clear that even those who were very committed and extremely steadfast, felt that physical environments played an important role in evoking certain "sacred" feelings and contributed to the "sacred experience".

While the relocation and demolition of religious buildings and the associated arguments cited in support of such actions suggest the state is seeking ideological hegemony, the provision of religious sites and the preservation of selected religious buildings may be cited as examples of genuine state support for religion. After all, there is no reason why a state that does not support religion should provide religious sites or preserve religious buildings. However, it could be argued that even when preserving religious buildings, such preservation is not inimical to the state at all. In fact, it is appropriate for state ends. Specifically, preservation articulates and supports in practice those very values that the state seeks to perpetuate, such as entrepreneurship, economic prosperity and progress. This is because these preserved buildings are incorporated into the tourist industry as exhibits and as showcases of Singapore's multi-religious setting. It is evident in the ways in which the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board appropriates and "sells" these preserved monuments in their promotional literature on Singapore (Singapore: Official Guide, 1989:32-9; 1990:26-9; 49-50; 58-63).

Furthermore, although the state has chosen to illustrate its recognition of religion and religious needs by providing sites for places of worship, their policies only acknowledge religious needs at a superficial level, admitting only that people who are religious need a place of worship, much like people who are ill need a clinic and children need schools. The recognition does not include the latent, private levels of meanings associated with religious places - certainly not of the sacredness invested in these places. If the state lay store by these values, then urban renewal would more often be planned around religious buildings. In short, the provision of religious sites does not reflect so much a recognition of sacredness -- for many, an important part of religion -- as a recognition of overt needs. This in fact exemplifies well a modernist approach to planning in which buildings are provided because of the functions they fulfil, while other values are de-emphasised, if not totally ignored.

To sum up, I have discussed in this section two ways in which churches, temples and mosques are politically symbolic. First, aside from the functional role they play in "pragmatic" planning blueprints, these buildings have political significance for the state because they are tangible evidence of the state's support for religion. With such concrete testimony, the state can hope to win political support from religious groups and individuals. Second, religious buildings are an important part of the state's exercise of hegemony. Specifically, the state has defined its own conceptions of rationality and public national interests, and on the basis of these conceptions, has implemented a demolition and relocation policy. The state then persuades religious groups and individuals that its particular constructions of rationality and public national interests are the only legitimate ones, and the actions arising from them are necessary for Singapore to survive and grow. These attempts at persuasion are ideologically hegemonic, and are further supported by arguments which conflate state and religious ideals, and which deny the meaningfulness of religious buildings to

ordinary individuals. Even when these buildings are clearly invested with sacred meaning and intense personal attachments, they are treated as no different from other buildings, and attempts are made to persuade people of this "truth". In other words, the state seeks to instil in people its particular sets of values which will allow it to maintain political power. This two pronged "attack" on both physical structures through demolition, and values through persuasion in public discourses, parallels the processes leading to the desanctification of Beijing, the celestial city, between 1860 and 1949 by Western powers. Physical structures which were the symbols of imperial elegance and power were destroyed. At the same time, there was a concomitant attack on the values of people. As Samuels and Samuels (1989:207) put it, the host of "entrepreneurial, technical and progressivist ideas about urban life and industrial prosperity, as well as a body of political, social, and economic values" were introduced and "confronted the integrity of the Imperial-Confucian world system". The result was that during the first three decades of the twentieth century, Beijing's urban landscape was totally transformed, and "the secular and the profane ultimately over-ran the sacred and the celestial fabric of old Beijing."

6.6 Multiculturalism and the special position of Muslims

Thus far, I have shown that while Singapore is officially accorded a secular status, the state has a large part to play in influencing religious places. At the same time, while freedom of worship is enshrined in the Constitution, religious groups have to operate within certain limitations. While on the one hand, there is to be a separation of religion and politics in that religious groups must not get involved in political issues, on the other, the state makes symbolic political use of religious buildings. These apparent contradictions may be understood in terms of how the state

attempts to garner political support in order to attain and maintain political power.

There is however one further contradiction, the commitment to multi-culturalism and equality of treatment on the one hand, and the special position accorded to Muslims on the other. In this section, I will discuss the special status of Muslims, particularly as they are evident in policies pertaining to mosques. The question of political costs and benefits will be raised, but a full discussion will be left to Chapter Seven, in which the reactions of individuals from other religious groups will be incorporated.

There are several ways in which the professed principles of equality of treatment contradict specific policies pertaining to mosques. First, the land prices paid by MUIS for their mosque sites are three to four times lower than their market values. As a statement from the Prime Minister's Office (Press Statement, 3 October 1987) explicitly outlined, the difference between the market value of the land and the concessionary price paid by MUIS for the fourteen mosque sites sold to MUIS between 1975 and 1987 was S$10.4 million. This meant that MUIS would otherwise have built four mosques less with the same amount of funds spent. Second, mosque sites are given 99 year leases whereas sites allocated to other religious institutions are given 30 year leases if they had been resettled, or 60 year leases through public tender. Third, contributions from Muslims towards the Mosque Building Fund are collected using the Central Provident Fund Board's machinery, pursuant to the provisions of sections 75A to 75F of the Administration of Muslim Law Act and the Administration of Muslim Law (Mosque Building Fund) Rules, 1975. The same facilities are not accorded other religious groups and, in fact, requests from the Hindu community were explicitly rejected. That this was meant to be a special concession was clear from a statement by Dr Ahmad Mattar, the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs: "When these

provisions were introduced, it was clearly intended that the concession was a special one and will not be a precedent for other religious or ethnic groups" (Parliamentary Debates, 3 December 1982, col. 311).

The only way in which these policies and actions can be understood is in the context of Article 152 of the Constitution, which, as I highlighted in section 6.2, recognises the special position of the Malays, and commits the government to "protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote", amongst other things, the religious interests of the Malays. However, as Mr Wong Kan Seng, Minister for Community Development, pointed out, it does not legally bind the government or oblige it to give the Muslim community any specific special privileges. Rather, whatever specific special considerations there may be can be attributed to a matter of policy (Personal interview, 5 April 1990). The political rationale for adopting policies which benefit the Muslim community are two-fold. First, they hold potential political benefits for the government in that they assure Muslims that they are being accorded their Constitutional rights. Second, failure to recognise these Constitutional rights could also have wider negative implications. As Ling (1989:706) pointed out:

> The problem for the government lies in the difficulty of taking measures which might be bitterly resented by the groups concerned, especially when those groups have powerful allies and co-religionists outside Singapore. In the case of Singapore Muslims, the government has shown itself not only aware of the potential danger but also scrupulously careful in its concern for their spiritual welfare.

While some political mileage may be gained from policies according Muslims special privileges, it could be argued that they can also carry political costs by antagonising other religious groups. In Chapter Seven, I will explore further some reactions from individuals of other religious groups in terms of how they view the differential treatment of Muslims.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the context and constraints within which religious lives are set and in particular, I have examined state policies towards religion and religious buildings. These have demonstrated state conceptions of religious places and how these conceptions are translated into policies influencing religious landscapes. Although I have confined my discussion to the state's roles in influencing public religious buildings, namely churches, temples and mosques, I have shown that the role of the state is indeed significant, for it has framed the constraints in terms of the establishment, demolition, relocation and preservation of religious buildings. By examining such policies, alongside others pertaining to religion in general, as well as public discourses by state representatives, it may be concluded that the state's conceptions of religious buildings are simultaneously modernist and political. In one sense, state conceptions are based on highly functional notions of buildings. Religious buildings are thus provided to function as places where people can pray. At the same time, such buildings also serve as political symbols for the state. First, these buildings are means by which the state can hope to garner political support. Second, they are means through which political power can be exercised while people are persuaded of the reasonableness of state actions, particularly in relation to demolition and relocation. In short, the state maintains political power by being ideologically hegemonic. However, as Gramsci (1973) highlighted, hegemony is never fully achieved. Domination is never total nor static, but always contested. Resistance can take a variety of forms. It can be active and open but it can also be latent and symbolic. In Chapter Seven, I will go on to discuss people's responses to the hegemonic controls discussed here, in particular, how meanings are "negotiated" and/or resisted, given the constraints set by the state.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EXPLORING THE STATE, INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP NEXUS: UNDERLYING TENSIONS AND THE "NEGOTIATION" OF MEANINGS

7.1 Introduction

In this final empirical chapter, I draw together the meanings and values invested in religious buildings by individuals (and collectively, by religious groups) on the one hand, and on the other, the various conceptions of these same buildings by the state. The chapter will be divided into five sections. In section 7.2, I will explore the nexus between the state and religious individuals and groups by spelling out in explicit terms the tensions which arise between individuals who experience these places as "insiders" and the state which adopts the perspective of "outsiders". Despite these tensions, there have not been major collisions between state and religious groups. In section 7.3, I will discuss the possible reasons why. I argue that conflict is avoided because individuals have found ways of adapting and "negotiating" the meanings they invest in religious buildings. In section 7.4, I focus specifically on the home as a religious place to show that it is an important hub along the religious circuit and that the sacredness invested in them is also a form of adaptation for individuals. While people have adapted their meanings, there have also been certain cases of resistance. In section 7.5, I explore some of the material and symbolic acts of resistance against state actions both by individuals and groups. In section 7.6, I discuss some of the possible reasons why the material strategies of resistance have often been ineffectual. Finally, in section 7.7, I summarise my major arguments in this chapter.

7.2 "Insiders" and "outsiders": oppositional meanings and values and resultant tensions

In this section, I will spell out the specific tensions between religious individuals and groups, and the state. These underlying tensions arise from the oppositional meanings and values pertaining to religious buildings. The following discussion will focus first on the tensions that arise over the establishment of religious buildings. This will be followed by a discussion of those arising as a result of preservation, and finally, relocation and demolition.

In the establishment of religious buildings, three levels of potentially divisive tensions are apparent. First, the religious building embodies tension between state regulation and divine will. For example, in the setting up of religious places, Cheng, a Methodist, recognises that the state is guided by "rationality" and "pragmatic" planning. However, in his view, one should really do as the spirit guides, for it is faith that underlies the setting up of churches and which "sweep(s) (people) to do as the spirit leads them". The tension arises particularly when the two differing ideological systems embodied in pragmatic planning and divine guidance pull in different directions. For example, a group may seek to establish a building for worship because it feels that it is divine will and that the community is ready for it and needs it. The state, on the other hand, is guided by "rational" and "pragmatic" planning principles, and does not offer any sites for use. Many church groups for instance find themselves in this position, and have turned to the use of hotel function rooms, school halls, house-churches and the like as substitutes. To cite a specific example, Wong (1986), in The Building of a Dream, chronicled the way in which the Mount Carmel group felt divine guidance led them to set up a church building (today the Clementi Bible Centre), and how planning procedures made it difficult for their efforts to be realised quickly. For instance, in the planning blueprints, there were "no designated

religious sites available" in the place the group requested; subsequently, in following the planning regulations, the group lost the tender for a site in Pasir Panjang Road. The disappointments and frustrations experienced by the group are clearly documented by Wong (1986) and while there was no overt ill-will against the state, the case study illustrates the potential conflicts between state and religious individuals/groups. Such tensions were also obvious in comments by some of my interviewees who recognised state power in directing the establishment and growth of places of worship. Their comments reveal a strong sense of resignation and powerlessness. Typical responses which illustrate such resigned acceptance of state actions include, for example,

> HDB holds all the power. What right do we have?
>
> Beggars can't be choosers.
>
> If it is in the Master Plan, there is nothing we can do about it. We have to accept it.

Such instances of people's perceptions of divine will guiding them in one direction while state regulation pulls in another are also evident in other situations where there has occasionally been more overt resistance. For example, some Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to do any military duty in the National Service or even to wear uniforms because their religion claims a neutral position in times of war and because the doctrine of the sect is that "'Satan' and its dispensation are responsible for all organised Government and religion" (Ministry of Home Affairs Press Statement, 14 January 1972). In this instance, the state responded by de-registering the Jehovah's Witnesses[1] and asking the group's missionary to leave Singapore. Another example

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[1] Religious groups in Singapore are required to register themselves with the Registry of Societies. However, there are some which have not registered at all or if registered, have done so under the Registry of Companies. This is because some old temples make no effort to register while other groups had done so under the Registry of Companies in the past when the Registry of Societies was not in existence (Personal communication with Senior Assistant Registrar: Religious, Cultural and Social Section, Registry of Societies, 27 February 1990).

of such a tension is when some individuals refuse to sit for university examinations on Saturdays because they are considered holy days. They prefer to do the subsequent supplementary examinations meant as a second chance for those who do not pass the main examinations.

At a second level, there is also a tension between the state with its particular set of values ("pragmatism", "rational" planning, "efficient" use of land), and religious groups which have a different set of perceived needs. Kumar, a Hindu interviewee, expresses this in his analysis of locations of Hindu temples:

> The trouble is we don't get land where we want it, and they offer us where there is no need for a temple, and if you do go and build a temple, and it's not frequented, it'll just be a white elephant.

Third, the way in which religious buildings are set up are also cited by interviewees as tangible evidence of the state's discriminatory behaviour towards different groups, which fosters tension not just between state and religion, but also between different religious groups. Kumar points to the "ubiquitous" and "imposing" mosques which have been, and are being, constructed as evidence of a certain discrimination in favour of the Muslim community:

> ... we all get the feeling that we all see a mosque everywhere; in every town, you see a mosque, a real imposing structure, but you don't get to see a temple and all that ... the temples that are being built nowadays are being built in real out of the way places.

This resentment he feels is potentially dangerous because it builds up unhappiness between religious groups. In Prema's view, the only way not to create or exacerbate such tensions is to ensure that all groups are treated equally:

> I think it's got to be either all or nothing. Either we have a separation of church and state or we don't. And I think that particularly, and again, this is very dangerous ground, but singling out one particular racial or religious group, for benefit or otherwise, can only work to that

group's disadvantage, because what that means is everyone else is going to resent them. And, understandably, it's been done all along to protect them (the Malays) and to protect the preservation of their culture, and to make sure they didn't get swallowed up by the rest of us, because they were here first. But after, what, we've got a couple of hundred years of history, it's enough. And I think the real problem that we have here now is that everyone else is going to resent it so much, in the sense that, don't the rest of us have a culture that is worth preserving?

Given such views, it is clear that there is a divide between the way in which the state would like to portray its commitment to multi-culturalism, and the way in which individuals experience the policy in practice. The state recognises the need for all the different religious groups to appreciate a general commitment to multi-culturalism, as the following extract from Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong's (then Minister for Trade and Industry and Second Minister for Defence) speech shows:

> ... should any group feel threatened ... because they receive less than even-handed treatment from the Government, then that group too must respond by mobilising themselves to protect their interests, if necessary militantly. Tensions will build up, and there will be trouble for all (30 April 1989).

The in-depth interviews would suggest that public perceptions of even-handed treatment is not universally and always true, and that beneath the veneer of religious harmony in Singapore is a sense of unfairness and lack of parity in treatment.

In the preservation of religious places, it would appear that there is little tension generated between the state, and individuals and groups. Ostensibly, the preservation of such buildings also means that places cherished by individuals and communities have not been destroyed. However, preservation does not ensure that the meanings invested in these places remain the same. In fact, religious buildings which become recognised as "national monuments" take on other meanings, as historical and cultural artifacts and as tourist attractions. In other words, these places

are appropriated and their meanings are re-defined by the Preservation of Monuments Board and the tourist authorities. Certainly, the meanings invested in these buildings by tourists are often different from the meanings invested by religious adherents who worship at these places. Such appropriation and redefinition are not totally rejected by the individuals and communities affected, for some accept that tourists may like to visit their places of worship. However, there are reservations which indicate potential underlying tensions. For example, some believe the private, personal relationship between an individual and his/her deity becomes open to the public eye and made an object of curiosity through tourism. There is also another view that shrines, statues and the like become treated as pieces of art. For some interviewees, such shrines and statues are imbued with a sacredness, indicating a god's presence. It is the height of insult and affront when tourists begin to put their arms around the statue of a god for a photograph.

A corollary to the redefinition of religious places (from a place of worship to a tourist destination) is the encouragement of a tourist souvenir trade within the compounds of religious places. As I showed in Chapter Five, buying and selling in religious places are often considered inappropriate by interviewees. The atmosphere and the sacredness of religious places are intruded upon and the original functions of the places compromised for profit. Given such views, it is not surprising that most interviewees believe tourism should not be encouraged unless the religious leaders are themselves able and willing to set certain rules. As one interviewee put it, tourism should not be encouraged by external groups for it is not their religious places and religious activities which are invaded. In other words, the call is for the power of definition to be given back to the respective religious groups or at least, to their respective religious leaders.

In an article on "valued environments", Burgess and Gold (1982:2) suggested that "the strength of attachment to ordinary places and landscapes frequently only emerges when they are threatened by change." Such change often takes the drastic form of destruction, or "topocide" as Porteous (1988) termed it. I too have found that the attachments to and meanings of religious buildings for individuals become particularly heightened when these places are threatened with relocation and demolition. In this sense, relocation and demolition prove to be the most sensitive and the most potentially divisive actions by the state, since places which are of great value and importance to people are being destroyed. It is here that the tension between the "rationality" and "pragmatism" of the state clashes head-on with the sacredness and personal meanings invested by the individual. The "objective" outsider mentality conflicts with the "subjective" and intense insider experiences, leaving insiders (individuals) feeling a sense of "anger and resentment", "a sense of loss and deprivation", "like something was suddenly taken away from you." Two very intense reactions are expressed by Prema who sees the Hindu temple as "almost like god's embassy". Destroying a temple is like tearing down god and

> ... that is painful, particularly when you put something that's steel and chrome up. You're not quite sure that on sacred ground they're treating it as holy.

It would seem that such actions are particularly unacceptable because symbols of "modernity" ("steel and chrome") are put in place of the old and the treasured. Not only would it be tearing down god, it was to Prema also like tearing a part of herself down. Her comments illustrate the intensity of emotions that can be aroused and which must be dealt with when religious places are demolished. In fact, such intensity of emotions is not surprising. They parallel Foster's (1981) discussion of the emotions evoked when disused churches in rural central and southern Minnesota were threatened with non-religious use. He suggested that the closure of churches as

religious buildings was difficult to accept for some because of strong personal feelings towards the church. Several generations of family had attended that church, and had been baptised, married and buried there. As one individual put it, "It's like losing a member of the family" (Foster, 1981:6).

In sum, this section has focused on specific areas in which the state's modernist and functionalist conceptions of religious places, and the consequent policies and actions, conflict with the meanings and values invested by religious individuals and groups. In particular, I have highlighted tensions that arise over the establishment of religious buildings, their preservation, as well as relocation and demolition. I have illustrated the intensity of emotions aroused in some instances, but curiously, despite these emotions, there have not been major clashes between the state and religious groups over such issues. Tensions have either remained latent or resistance has been mild and ineffectual. In the next section, I examine some of the reasons why tensions have remained latent. Questions of resistance will be dealt with in sections 7.5 and 7.6.

7.3 Responses to ideological hegemony: Forms of adaptation

Despite the fact that many individuals cherish their religious buildings and perceive and treat them as sacrosanct, they have coped with the destruction of these buildings. In this section, I suggest that individuals deal with destruction through emotional and behavioural adaptation; people erect defences to protect themselves from the anger and pain of seeing their sacred places demolished or to comfort themselves if they should feel the resentment. I will deal with three such types of adaptation. The first demonstrates by far the line of least resistance and involves two

levels of acceptance: acceptance at an ideological level, illustrating the success of the hegemonic process; and acceptance of state actions, without the concomitant acceptance of state ideology. The second means of adaptation is a rationalisation process; and the third is investment in alternative notions of the sacred.

First, illustrating the total success of hegemonic control, there are those who come to terms with the destruction of their religious places by accepting the ideological arguments put forth by the state. At least some interviewees from every single religious group covered in this study displayed this acceptance of state ideology. They argue that state actions are "rational" and "necessary". For example, some argue there are religious buildings which have to go because they are old and in a bad state anyway. To them, rehabilitation does not seem to be an option. Others point out that the old are replaced with new and better buildings. Demands are still met. Some buildings are unused or underused and do not deserve to remain standing. Demolition is all part of "pragmatic" planning and will contribute to more efficient use of space. Growth and change are inevitable. All these reflect the adoption of modernist arguments in planning which recognise the observable functions of places but not the often intangible meanings and values invested. There are even those who deny the sacredness of religious places and refuse to demarcate space as sacred or profane. For example, Kumar, a Hindu, suggested that "rationally", the temple is but "sand and stone" and thus meaningless in itself. Yet, this goes against Hindu beliefs in which the temples are not meaningless structures. In fact, the buildings and all they house are extremely significant symbolically. For example, temples are built with great precision according to a blend of religious concepts and mathematical principles so they can function in harmony with the environment and the universe. Even the size and proportions of the gods and goddesses are measured with extreme precision according to set rules. While Kumar may not have known the exact symbolism of

every facet of Hindu temples, he was well aware that they harboured symbolic meanings. Despite this knowledge, the fact that he could still suggest that they were merely "sand and stone" indicates that the state's arguments about the meaninglessness of buildings in themselves have been successful in this case.

While in the above instance, political arguments differ from religious principles, there are cases when political and religious principles seem to reinforce each another. In these instances, the state's use of ideological arguments receive a boost; it becomes that much easier to persuade people of the naturalness of state actions. For example, Cheng, a Methodist, argued that if a religious building had to give way so that a road could be widened to ease traffic congestion, it was for the benefit of all, and as a Christian testimony, "we should do something good for the country, and not think of ourselves first." Such an attitude would have been Machiavelli's explanation of why earlier peoples seemed to be more fond of liberty than his contemporaries. To him, it was because of the particular conception of religion which "glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action" (Larrain, 1979:18). Such a conception placed great premium on humility and abnegation. As a result, the world was full of people who were concerned with "how to bear, rather than how best to avenge, their injuries", a frame of mind which allowed others to rule over them securely and successfully (Larrain, 1979:18). In the present context, if denying oneself of a religious place of immense meaning is for a perceived larger good, then it is a supreme example of abnegation to which good Christians should aspire. This sacrifice for the "larger good" is precisely what the state appeals for. Their attempts at persuasion become that much easier because their arguments strike a chord with certain religious teachings.

At another level, there is acceptance of and compliance with state actions,

whether in land allocation and establishment of religious buildings, or relocation and demolition, but without concomitantly imbibing state ideology. These interviewees do not necessarily agree with state arguments or engage in the rhetoric. However, instead of resisting, they adapt by either finding refuge in religious teachings or keeping faith in divine intervention. Christians in particular tend to find refuge in their religious teachings and many invoke biblical teachings to help them deal with the demolition of their churches. For example, as Pauline, a Catholic, argued, if the land belonged to the state, then "render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar". At another level, Joseph, another Roman Catholic, stressed the transience of life on earth and pointed out that "man is only a pilgrim on earth". Therefore, it made sense to learn to be detached from earthly things, including buildings, even if they were religious buildings. This reflects very closely Buddhist doctrine which Eng Teng and the Venerable Sangye (a lay Buddhist and a Buddhist nun respectively) invoke. Both refer to religious places as part of the material world, and stress that material things are impermanent. Their aim was to learn to transcend these material tangible things and be free of any ties to them. In this sense, when sacred places are taken away, there would be no problem.

Apart from invoking religious teachings, there are also those who can accept state actions because they have faith in divine intervention. The immediate and unequivocal response of Mr Tan, an old traditional Chinese religionist, when asked for his views on the demolition of religious buildings, was that there would be divine retribution for meddling with sacred places of the gods. A less grim and perhaps more hopeful response came from Anne, a Methodist, who thought that if God did not want the place to be destroyed, he would provide a way for it to be saved. But if it was his will, then Christians should accept demolition as part of God's larger cosmic plan. For those who seek to establish their religious places but find that state

regulations either prevent or make it difficult for them to do so, they too have been able to accept state action by finding refuge in faith. For example, the Mount Carmel group cited above had several applications for a site rejected on planning grounds. For example, there was no designated religious site in either Bukit Merah, Leng Kee or Brickworks constituencies where they first looked for a site. They lost the tender for a site in Pasir Panjang. They were refused office space in the Bukit Merah Town Centre because it was not meant for religious use. Their application to build a church in Jubilee Road was turned down because the area was residential and could not admit a church with its attendant activities and traffic. In order to cope with their repeated disappointments and frustrations, the safety valve for the group was a belief that it was not God's will that they obtain each particular site. In this sense, the potential resentment and anger against the planning machinery was averted. This parallels Prorok's (1986:135) findings in her study of the Hare Krishna in West Virginia. In their choice of a site for their temple, practical considerations included easy availability and low costs and when they found one that fulfilled those conditions, the group interpreted it as a direct sign from Krishna that the site should be designated as a sacred place.

Apart from these forms of acceptance and compliance with state actions, if not state ideology, a second means of adaptation takes the form of rationalisation. Specifically, some interviewees try to rationalise their sacred experience and attempt to explain their feelings when they are in churches, temples and/or mosques. In other words, by "rationalisation", I refer to the interviewees' process of applying logic or reason to their feelings, which need not necessarily carry negative connotations that come with justifying actions which do not accord with belief. Hence, Reverend Lim, for example, argues that the settings in churches may convey the sense of a divine presence, or the sense of sacredness, but it does not imply that the place is in and of

itself sacred. Prema suggests that the feelings of peace and quiet and the sense of appropriate behaviour may be "learned behaviour", rather like "Pavlov's dog". But this, she argues, does not necessarily imply in any way that the place is sacred. Wen Mei, in turn, tries to provide a rational understanding of her feelings when she enters churches:

> Maybe it's the coldness of the stone; maybe it's the fact that people always whisper in churches; maybe it's the ... architecture ... high roofs always make any sound in there ... very quiet anyway.

There were also those who attempted to rationalise and separate sacredness, personal ties and experiences from place. For example, Prema's love for her grandmother and her relationship with her gods were undoubtedly intense and often bound up with her favourite temple, but she tried to make a separation of all these elements rationally:

> I think I couldn't tell you that tearing it down meant you were taking away my grandmother, you were taking away god. That would continue.

Emotionally, her relationships with others (her grandmother) and the "Other" (god) were closely intertwined with place (the temple), but intellectually, she tried to separate them into distinct elements.

Finally, a third set of adaptations involves individuals investing in alternative notions of sacredness and sacred places. In other words, sacredness resides in more than just religious buildings, extending beyond them into other realms. In some instances, these alternative notions of the sacred are derived from religious teachings though this need not always be so.

First, as Reverend Vuyk, a Roman Catholic priest stressed, God himself is

sacred first and foremost. As long as God is present, there is sacredness, and the place is immaterial. This stems from Hebrew thought in which holy places have no innate sanctity (Houston, 1978:229). Instead, reverence for a sacred place is a "celebration of events" rather than "a reverence for primordial holiness per se. ... Without Yahweh there could be no holiness, no people, no land. A triadic relationship bound Yahweh in covenant with his people and the promised land."

Second, extending from the view that God is sacred, Reverend Vuyk also argues that other things are sacred insofar as they are related to God. Hence, in his view, "Man" is sacred because "in us, God's presence can be known." Similarly, Anne, a Methodist, suggests that "the real temple of God is within us." This reflects biblical teachings that "we are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:16). This reference to humans as sacred is also echoed by a recently-converted Buddhist Hock Lim, who declares that "a person is sacred if he or she practises mindfulness". Further, many Christians see the church to be the "community of believers". A Methodist pastor Reverend Lim, suggests that the "divine place" is the place where a community gathers in the name of God and to worship him. By thus relegating the specific place to secondary importance, these interviewees are in effect providing themselves with a way of accepting the destruction of religious places. Relatedly, some Christian interviewees also stress the view that the community is the church and that the community is in itself sacred. As Joseph, a Catholic, pointed out, "what is important is the people, the church ... the people are the church ... The important thing is we, the people. We form the church." Biblical references can be cited to support this. For instance, in the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, it is written:

> Didn't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you? ... the temple of God is sacred: and you are that temple (1 Corinthians, 3:16-17).

Aside from seeing sacredness in God and humans, interviewees also invested in a third notion of sacred places. They deny that sacredness is exclusive to religious places, and argue instead that God is everywhere and everywhere is God's ground. There is no reason why one place should be different from the next – no place is more sacred than another.

A fourth way in which interviewees deny that the overtly religious place has a monopoly of sacredness is to argue that sacredness is an experience which involves "experiencing God's presence", as Reverend Vuyk puts it. He argues one can undergo this experience in different places. For example, standing by the seaside and watching the sunset could be a sacred experience for some; or as Wen Mei suggests, standing on top of a mountain and looking out to sea evokes the same kind of feeling for her. This is akin to James' (1902:27) argument that "religious awe is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge". In short, sacredness is an experience and the experience is not confined to any one particular place. By looking at it thus, people can deal with the demolition of churches, temples and mosques, because they also invest sacredness in other places. In a paper on the Niagara Falls, McGreevy (1985) illustrated the investment of sacred meaning in nature. He argued that the Niagara Falls was the "creator's shrine" because in creating Niagara, God had given a glimpse of his power and majesty. Indeed, Pope Pius IX had established a "pilgrim's shrine" at the Falls in 1861, in response to a request by Archbishop Lynch who felt that Niagara was too fantastic to have been brought about by chance. God must have put it there for a special purpose, and he should be adored "on the spot in which He manifests Himself in such incomparable majesty and grandeur."

Fifth, some respondents suggest that their god(s) are with them all the time

because they carry with them pictures, small sculptures, crosses and so forth, which, more often than not, have been "blessed". To borrow Maier's (1975) concept, these are like the "movable Torah" for the Jews. Maier (1975) argued that the Torah[2] symbolised the centre of home territory for the Jews in diaspora. Even though the community had to move, the centre remained with them. As he put it, "the role of Torah as movable territory developed as a substitute and in compensation for the loss of actual territory." As a parallel, "holy" pictures, sculptures, crosses and so forth seem to act to some degree as substitutes for religious places which may be destroyed under the "power of others". The idea is also similar to one view of holy relics that was common in Renaissance cities. As Muir and Weissman (1989:94-5) pointed out, for some Catholics then, it was theologically legitimate for holiness to be attributed to relics. The space around an object was also considered a hallowed zone. When the object was moved, so did its holiness and that of the zone around it.

Finally, people have invested in their dwelling places certain religious meanings which render them a limited alternative to public religious buildings. Unlike the latter over which individuals have little control, the house is a place where the individual can define and invest meanings with little interference by others. In the next section, I will discuss how the home is sacred for many people and how it also helps individuals deal with their lack of control over public religious buildings and their loss of these buildings.

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[2] The Torah refers to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or sometimes to the whole of the Hebrew Bible. The Jews have a handwritten parchment scroll of the Pentateuch known as a sefer Torah (or Book of the Torah). Every Sabbath, the community removes it from its ark and places it in the centre of the synagogue for all the people to hear and to see.

7.4 The house as a religious place

Although in contemporary society, there are few communities for whom the primary purpose of the house is religious,[3] there is no doubt that religious activities are often still carried out at home. As I highlighted in Chapter Five, homes are an important component of people's religious circuits. Religious activities at home can take a variety of forms, as interviewees indicate. They range from reading the scriptures or religious books to incense-burning; from saying grace before meals to burning joss-sticks and joss-paper to daily supplication to the gods with flowers and food (usually fruits and less often cooked food) (see also Kuo and Quah, 1988:42-3; and Tong, 1988:21).

In my case studies, the house as a private place of prayer offers individuals an alternative to their public religious buildings. Great store is placed by the sanctifying of the house or particular parts thereof. Care is taken to observe certain codes of behaviour in the sanctified areas of the dwelling place and a vast majority of respondents perform some form of religious activity very frequently at home.

The house is sometimes sanctified by ritual. For example, Kumar describes the Hindu ritual of house blessing:

> A special day is chosen ... If you have a new house, you're not supposed to live in the house until these prayers and rituals are conducted. So ... they look at the calendar and they decide what is a good day and a good time and then they call a priest down, and then

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[3] This is in contrast to the past where the house was often a shrine as well. Deffontaines' (1953) examples from pre-industrial societies illustrate this. For the early Romans, there was no other temple but the house. In the ancient Chinese house, everything was sacred, from the roof to the walls to the door and well. In fact, for the majority, the only temple was the altar inside the house. For the Annamites of the Tonkin Delta in Indochina, the dwelling is primarily meant to shelter ancestor tablets. There is no difference in plan between temple and dwelling.

what is known as a blessing ceremony (takes place) -- we go through all that. ... (the priest) chants prayers, and there is this sacrificial fire where he sort of throws in certain items to please the gods. Things like some fruits and this and that; some things my mother has made. Sort of to bless the house; a kind of sacrifice, to drive away the evil spirits and get in the good spirits. And then he showers sacred water all over the place; and then, the lady of the house ... boils a pot of milk; milk is supposed to be very sacred. She boils it and then she dishes it out to all who are present. It's sacred.

At the same time, parts of the house are sometimes designated as special areas. This may take a variety of forms. It could be a room set aside for prayers (often what are intended as store rooms in HDB flats); it could be some space atop a book case or a specially constructed altar (Plates 7.1 to 7.3), which could vary in size, location, complexity of the structure, as well as the specific statues and pictures displayed. It could also be space outside one's house, as Plates 7.4 to 7.6 show. Wherever the precise areas may be, there is no doubt that they are special. Areas are cleaned with particular care. Catholic interviewees setting up home altars also have their crosses and/or statues of Christ, Mary or any of the saints blessed by a priest. Hindu interviewees and traditional Chinese religionist interviewees speak of inviting their deities to dwell in the statues at their home altars. Furthermore, the religious symbolism of churches, temples and mosques are also paralleled at different levels in private homes. For example, in setting up a Hindu home altar, the height at which it is constructed is symbolic. As Kumar points out, it should ordinarily be at eye-level, so that one is not looking down at the gods when one prays. If it has to be at ground level, then individuals would have to sit down to say their prayers at the altar. If at all possible, the altar would be set up facing the east for the same reason that the temple is: the first rays of the sun will strike the deities, and the power infused and subsequently radiated to the family. The Hindu altar at home is also never to be found in or near the kitchen or toilets because these areas would defile the sacred spots. As Knott (1982:107) found in the case of Hindus in Leeds, the home

Plate 7.1 A Mahayana Buddhist's home altar

Plate 7.2 A Chinese religionist's home altar

Plate 7.3 A Chinese Catholic's home altar

Plate 7.4 Buddhist "shrine" at a house entrance

Plate 7.5 Buddhist "shrine" at a house entrance: close up view

Plate 7.6 Chinese religionist's "shrine"at a house entrance

altar (or domestic mandir[4] as she termed it) is always treated with respect and is often curtained off when not in use.

In discussing the designation of sacred spots in the house, the case of Muslims and "Other Christians" deserve particular attention. Muslims depart from all the other groups in that those interviewed and surveyed did not have altars, statues or pictures individually or forming a collection in a spot where they pray. Yet, it is not true to say that for them, the house is not connected in any way with sacredness in a religious sense. Even while religious teachings advocate that they can pray anywhere, most Muslims appear to have their own special places in the home. These can be a store-room converted into a prayer room, or a particular area in one's bedroom which is regularly used for prayer, especially once the prayer mat is laid out. At the same time, like the Hindu home altars, these Muslim places of prayer are never found in or near kitchens or toilets to avoid defilement. They are also kept particularly clean. Thus, even while Muslims' sacred spots at home differ in form from those of the others groups, they nonetheless exist.

In the case of "Other Christians", I draw attention particularly to the more charismatic groups who emphasise a close knowledge of the Word of God and a more literal translation of the Bible, and who generally eschew the rituals and symbolism of Catholicism and High Anglicanism. Given that in many of their churches, there is a conscious tendency not to be heavily gilded and not to have too many statues, crosses and the like, one would expect the home as a place of prayer would be equally devoid of religious symbols. Yet, I found this to be untrue when I visited households to conduct my questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews. It was clear

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[4] Literally, the mandir means an "abiding place" or "dwelling", and is regarded as the dwelling place of the deity. It is often used to refer to the temple.

that many charismatic Christians still set aside corners, alcoves, desk tops and so forth for a collection of religious paraphernalia. Seldom are there statues, as is the case with Catholics, but there are crosses, verses and posters, for instance. Often, respondents and interviewees would show me these spots, set up in parts of the house where they like to sit and read the Bible and spend a little "quiet time" reflecting. Thus, despite a theological position which de-emphasises the significance of places and material, tangible religious symbols, a certain degree of importance is still attached to them at the lay level.

Another way in which it is evident that the dwelling place functions as a religious and sacred place is the care in which certain codes of behaviour are observed. These codes include generally shared ones as well as others which are more peculiar to particular individuals and families. For example, interviewees across religions agree that components of the altar should not be tampered with. Hence, Soo Ling, a syncretic Chinese religionist is told by her mother that the offerings of fruits should not be tampered with and that she should take care not to upset things on the altar. Joan, a Catholic, would not move her family's statues of Jesus, Mary and the Holy Family around unnecessarily. At the same time, Chandran, a Hindu, and Karen, a Catholic, both agree that one does not place "all sorts of things" in front of altars. There is, in other words, a demarcation of space around altars, whether consciously or otherwise. This space, for all intents and purposes, appears to some degree to be a "hallowed zone". There are also other codes which appear peculiar to individuals and their families. For example, Soo Ling talks of how it is considered disrespectful to sneeze or yawn in front of the home altar, just as Karen does not like people to stand with their backs to the altar. In addition, there are also ways of maintaining the sanctity of religious places. Principally, cleanliness is a prerequisite across religions. Zakir, a Muslim, ensures that his prayer room is clean at all times. The

same can be said of Mrs Nair's Durga altar at home, Soo Ling's Kuan Yin and ancestor altar, and Karen's Catholic altar. Even the cleaning of the altar is laden with symbolism, in some cases. For example, when Joan's family cleans the altar, the statues are washed in holy water. The washing is also usually done in time for Easter, a period of rebirth and new hope.

Finally, the frequency at which individuals pray at home would also indicate that it is significant as a place of religious activity. Table 7.1 illustrates this clearly. The vast majority of respondents in the questionnaire survey indicated that they pray at home more than once a week, often everyday. In the case of Muslims, the proportion is 93.9%; for Catholics, it is 84.6%; for "Other Christians", 91.8%; for Hindus, 81.4%; and for Chinese religionists, 66.7%.

In short, whether it is in the religious activities that take place in the house, the frequency with which they occur, the codes of behaviour, or the symbolism of form and actions, it is evident that the house, or parts of it, are treated as sacred places. Public religious buildings therefore do not have a monopoly on sacredness, since homes provide alternative notions of sacredness and sacred places. Among all the various alternative notions I have discussed, I would argue the house as a place of worship is of paramount importance. This is because it is a place which individuals have access to and a certain degree of control over, in the sense that individuals and families can create and define their sacred places within the house. Having this alternative helps people to cope with the fact that their churches, temples or mosques may disappear. If they had absolutely no other place in which they could pray and in which they could invest some form of sacred meaning, then the destruction of their sacred churches, temples or mosques, would probably be far less acceptable. As it is, the house acts as a sort of buffer. That people have control over their private homes

Table 7.1: Frequency at which respondents pray at home

Frequency	Muslims	Catholics	Other Christians	Hindus	Chinese Religionists
More than once a week	93.9% (92)	84.6% (49)	91.8% (67)	81.4% (35)	66.7% (152)
Once a week	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	3.1% (7)
Once every 2-3 weeks	- (-)	1.7% (1)	- (-)	- (-)	7.5% (17)
Once a month	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	1.7% (4)
A few times a year or less	- (-)	3.4% (2)	1.4% (1)	- (-)	8.3% (19)
Never	6.1% (6)	10.3% (6)	6.8% (5)	18.6% (8)	12.7% (29)
Total	100.0% (98)	100.0% (58)	100.0% (73)	100.0% (43)	100.0% (228)

and can create and define their own sacred places within is further supported by Chua's (1988a) study which illustrates how the various groups have adapted to their standardised HDB flats from their traditional houses. In the case of the Chinese, for example, traditionally, an important place is the end wall of the living room where the altar is often placed. In the HDB three-room flat, the entrance to the kitchen/dining area (also the exit from the living room) is often centrally located (Figure 7.1). The walls on both sides of this entrance/exit are too narrow for the installation of the altar. People have enough control over their own spaces to be able to shift the kitchen entrance either to the left or right, so that the end wall is increased and the altar can be placed centrally against it. Such control is particularly important, because it is often possible only in the home. As Dovey (1985:57) argued, public and communally shared spaces have become increasingly managed and regulated by state authorities. In the same vein, as public religious places become regulated by the state, the "home becomes the sole area of personal control and security." The sense of control is important because as Werner et al. (1985) argued in the context of homes, one way in which people become tied to their homes is through appropriation, that is, amongst other things, the ability to exercise territorial control and regulate use by others.

However, despite the importance of the house as a place of worship, it is not a sufficient alternative to churches, temples and mosques. This is because of distinctions interviewees and respondents draw between the house and the public religious place. For the Chinese religionists in particular, the house is essentially for regular routine prayers while the temple is for special prayers. Further, while the house is suitable for personal, private prayers, churches, mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples are for public, communal worship, which in some cases is obligatory. Finally, there is a notion of a hierarchy of sacredness where the public

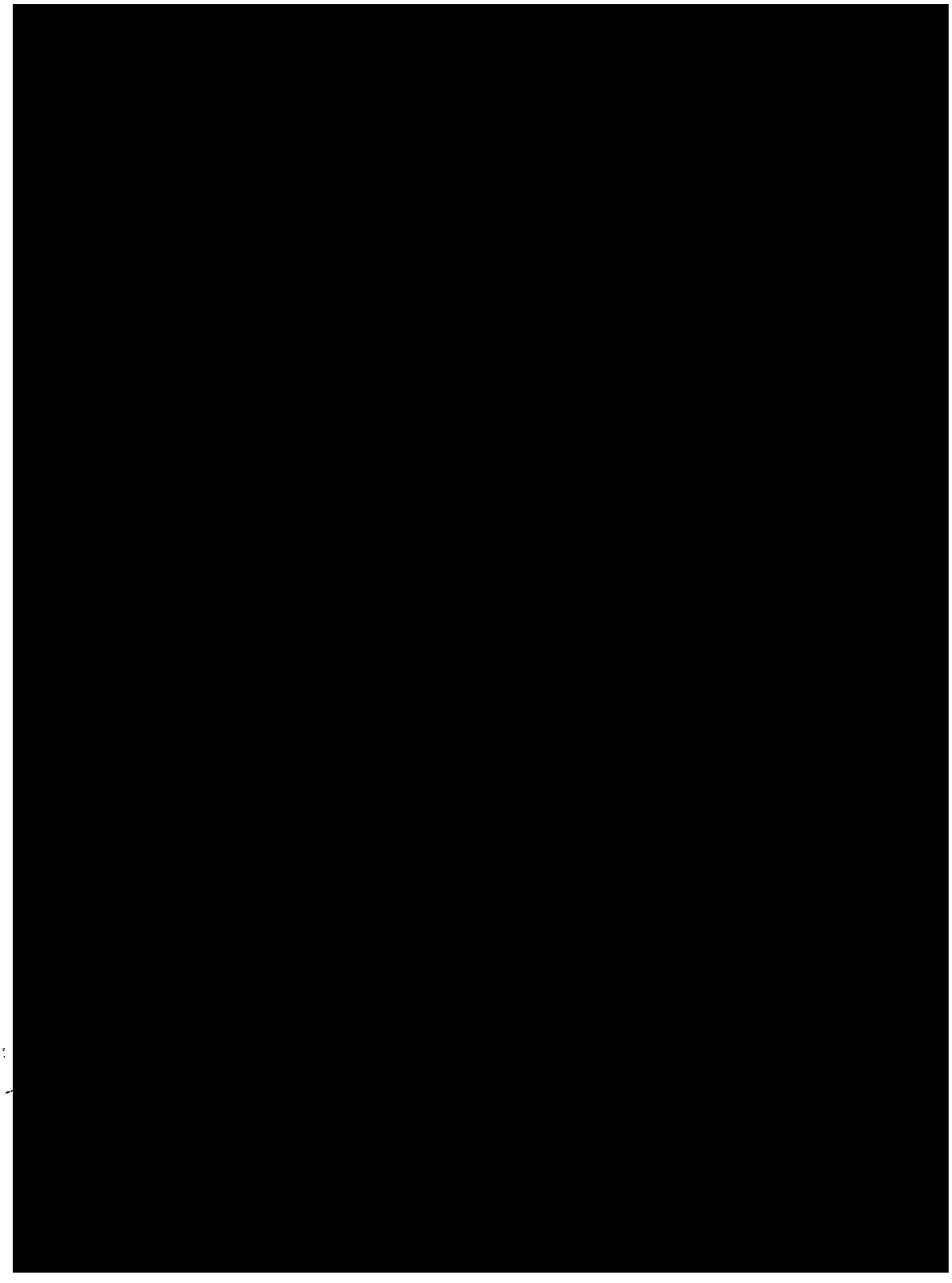

Figure 7.1: Prototype layout for HDB three-room flats

religious building is more sacred than the house. Zakir, a Muslim, for instance, speaks of the greater grace one gains by praying at the mosque in comparison to the house:

> ... it is stated in the religion that (if) you pray in the mosque, ... you get more grace than what you do at home. They use the term "pahala" you know. Pahala means grace. So whatever you do, you get pahala. Pahala means good points from God. So of course you pray at home, you get (some) pahala you see, but if you go to mosque, you get more than that.

Joan, a Catholic, compares directly the sense of sacredness and transgression between church and house altar:

> ... the church has that extra something special, more than the altar. The altar is amidst everything else, my cupboards, books, wardrobe, the fan etc. so it's something a little sacred above all else that is, um, not sacred, ordinary. But the church, well, everything inside is sacred. It sometimes feels like the ground itself is sacred, so when I tread, I tread softly. I don't romp around as I might at home, even in front of the altar, 'cos the ground in front of the altar is already "ordinary" ground, so to speak. I don't know. I think because the whole place from pews to tabernacle to nave to water font to statues to stations of the cross to hymnal shelves -- I think all that is sacred, the air inside is also sacred, not like the altar at home which is very very circumscribed. It's just that little corner. So, yeah, the feeling of transgression would be commensurately higher in the church.

These ways in which interviewees speak of their public religious buildings in contrast to house altars suggest that the latter can never be full substitutes for the former. Although houses cannot totally replace churches, temples and mosques, the limited "privatisation" of worship is favourable to the state. This is because attention is then not focused solely upon public places of worship, and some of the communality has been diffused. To a certain degree, any potential forms of organised resistance are then fractured.

With these various forms of adaptation, it would appear that individuals have

bridged the chasm between their notions of the sacred and their attachments to religious places on the one hand, and amongst other things, the "pragmatism" and "rationality" of a planned city, on the other. However, the real tension emerges when the same person will say the place is sacred and important, that he/she will feel a sense of loss when it is ripped down, and then in the same breath transfer sacredness to other places, deny the sacredness of religious buildings and/or rationalise his/her sacred experiences. This contradiction appears for example when Zakir says that God is everywhere but that the mosque is the "proper house of prayer" and where one feels "closer to God". It appears again when Kumar says first that to rip down her temple is like ripping down god and then, in close juxtaposition, says it is really only stone and sand. In these and other examples, it is made abundantly clear that there is a contradiction between what people feel and how they try to intellectualise afterwards. Sometimes, interviewees try to make sense of the demolition of their religious buildings and their feelings by using the state's terms, illustrating in these instances the success of ideological hegemony. At other times, they apply their religious teachings (which sometimes seems to reinforce state ideology) and their belief in divine intervention. The contradictions in the way some speak of their religious buildings does not suggest these places were not really sacred to them in the first place. What it illustrates is an "elasticity" of meanings (Muir and Weissman, 1989:99) and the shifting positions individuals have to adopt to cope with contextual constraints.

7.5 Material and symbolic "strategies of resistance"

> ... I suppose (if) you have to move, then you just ... have to give way.
>
> I don't like it, but I can't say anything, isn't it?

Reactions to relocation and demolition are often muted, seen in comments such as those above. Indeed, there is an acceptance of state actions, albeit grudgingly. But the state has not been totally successful in its attempts to gain hegemonic control. The sense is one of unhappiness and resentment, and yet a powerlessness to effect any changes. A similar resignation is reflected, for example, in the attitudes of West Enders in Boston of the 1950s when confronted with redevelopment, evidenced in Gans' (1962) classic study. As one of his informants put it, "Underneath we are all upset, but what can we do?" (Gans, 1962:342). In all these instances, compliance with state actions arise not from acceptance of state ideology but a sense of resignation and powerlessness, which is potentially dangerous because the negative feelings of resentment and pain are very real, and anger can build up, which leads to major clashes. In the context of Singapore, there have been some instances of resistance, both material and symbolic, though they have been neither explosive nor successful.

It is my intention in this section to discuss both the material and symbolic strategies of resistance that have been used in response to the hegemonic position adopted by the state. The concept of "strategy" has been used in a variety of contexts, such as "household work strategies", "coping strategies of unmarried mothers", and the "survival strategies of shanty town dwellers". While its use has varied, generally, the term would imply some measure of reflection over past circumstances, and anticipation of future ones, allowing for some "rational" decisions to be made on these bases. It would also involve some element of choice between alternative courses of action. This suggests there may be some exercise of power in choosing between options but it may also be a response to a lack of power. In other words, it may be a choice within constraints (Crow, 1989). It is this concept of "constrained choice" that is particularly relevant to my usage of the term "strategy". Specifically, I take the

term "strategy" to mean some deliberate action or set of actions chosen in the hope of attaining certain ends. The choices are made within contextual constraints and do not indicate the exercise of power so much as they reflect a response to a lack of power. Using this notion, I discuss in this section the strategies of resistance that individuals and groups adopt when confronted with state ideology and state action.

The clearest examples of how individuals and groups employ strategies of resistance against the state are when their religious buildings are threatened with relocation or demolition. Three cases can be cited to illustrate how different groups have reacted when informed of state intentions to relocate or demolish their respective buildings. Their reactions constitute deliberate acts of resistance in the hope of reversing the decisions to relocate or demolish, or at least ameliorating the consequences of such actions. Such resistance indicates that the state is not always entirely successful in its attempt at hegemonic control. Even if these acts of resistance have not been successful in that demolition and relocation eventually took place, they nonetheless reveal the fact that there are groups and individuals who do not accept unquestioningly that the state's actions are the "natural" and "rational" way of doing things.

In the case of a Chinese temple, the Tang Suahn Kiong San Soh Hoo Chu Buddhist Temple, previously in Henderson Road, the site was required for a swimming pool to be built by the HDB as part of the Bukit Merah Town Centre development project. The Gazette notification for acquiring the temple site was made in April 1973 and the site was acquired in April 1975 at a compensation payment of S$184000. The HDB repeatedly made offers to the trustees to combine with other similar resettlement cases to build a new temple on sites offered by the Board.

However, by January 1978, the trustees of the 120-year old temple were still insisting on the retention of the temple at the existing site. Their argument was that the temple was very popular with worshippers and was full of valuable artifacts which they felt should be preserved. The HDB, on the other hand, felt that the geographical location of the temple was highly undesirable because the surrounding land averaged eight to ten metres higher. It was also argued that the temple's artifacts could be removed and preserved at another site and not destroyed with the shell of the temple, "which is a simple brick structure" (quoted in Straits Times, 7 January 1978). Despite the arguments put up by the temple trustees and their initial refusal to move, they still had to vacate the premises eventually because, as shown in Chapter Three, the Land Acquisition Act (1966) confers upon the state power to compulsorily acquire land with no recourse for those affected.

A second example is a Catholic church currently caught in the process of relocation. The Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea in Sembawang Road stood on land which was on a yearly lease from the HDB. In November 1987, a clearance notice was issued to the church to vacate the premises by 31 December 1988, though they were actually allowed to stay on until they found a suitable site. The clearance was part of a redevelopment exercise in the Sembawang area. The church did not resist the move. This was possibly because the surrounding housing areas were also being redeveloped, and parishioners were moving out as well. Instead of resisting the move per se, part of the church's strategy was to make the best of the situation by doing three things. First, they appealed to the HDB and to various Members of Parliament (both Catholic MPs as well as their own constituency MP) for a relocation site to be offered to them at market price, thus saving them from competition at the bidding table. Second, they also applied for compensation. Both appeals were rejected, since the land on which the church stood was not being compulsorily

acquired -- instead the lease was not being extended. As such, legally, the Church, as ex-lessee of the land, qualifies for neither dispensation. The church therefore had to tender for a site in Yishun that had been offered to "public tender" for any Christian group. As it turned out, the church happened to be the only group to bid for the site. It is however not entirely happy with the conditions of the site. It is small (3805 square metres); only 35% of the land can be built up and the construction must not exceed 10.8 metres high. The view is that it will be difficult to accommodate what the Church sees as a growing Catholic population in the area. As a result, the third part of the church's strategy was to appeal against the limitations, but in spite of repeated efforts to bring their needs to the HDB's attention, the "HDB is ALMIGHTY" and there is "NO QUESTION of our requirements, needs, expectations, requests ..." (Correspondence with informant, 30 November 1988 and 11 February 1989).

In contrast to the strategy adopted by the Catholic church cited above, the Sikh community reacted differently to the HDB's acquisition of the Central Sikh Temple site in Queen Street. Although the Sikhs are a very small minority group in Singapore and I have chosen not to deal with them elsewhere in this thesis, this example will be cited simply to illustrate another resistance strategy. The original site in Queen Street was to be acquired because the area in which it stood was largely occupied by pre-war shophouses and was due for urban renewal. A Ministry of National Development statement pointed out that "comprehensive development compatible with good planning is not feasible if the site occupied by the temple is to be excluded." Hence, the land was to be compulsorily acquired to make way for three blocks of eight-storey flats and one block of nineteen-storey flats on a two-storey shopping podium. Although there is no compulsion for the government or its agency, the HDB, to provide alternative sites for religious buildings affected by public projects, it

made an exception in this case since the temple was the main Sikh temple catering to all sects. The government therefore helped look for a suitable site for its relocation (Straits Times, 17 January 1978). A site in Albert Street was offered in June 1977 but was turned down. Another site in Manila Street was offered in February 1978 which was again rejected. At that point, 750 members of the community attended a meeting, at the end of which three resolutions were passed. The first was that the state should preserve the temple as evidence that it was treating all religious groups even-handedly. The second urged the government to protect the religious rights and interests of the Sikh community. The third was a unanimous resolution that the temple should remain on the Queen Street site and that there was therefore no question of accepting an alternative site, or selling or exchanging it (Straits Times, 9 February 1978). The resolutions were sent to the then President Henry B. Sheares and the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In May 1978, the Prime Minister met with nine Sikh community leaders and stressed two points. One was that all religions were and would continue to be treated equally. Another was that Singapore's "progress through redevelopment must go on", meaning that the "old must give way to new -- and this covered churches, temples, mosques and so on" (quoted in Straits Times, 18 May 1978). He also extracted from the Sikh representatives an agreement that there had been no discrimination against the Sikh community in Singapore. After the meeting, a spokesman for the group expressed confidence that the matter would be resolved amicably soon "as the Sikh community wants also to contribute to the progress of the nation" (Straits Times, 18 May 1978). Eventually, the community moved out of their premises into temporary buildings until in 1986 when they moved into their new temple in Towner Road.

Aside from such appeals, meetings and resolutions which, though unsuccessful, constitute material strategies of resistance, there are also symbolic acts of resistance to

state power by using religious buildings. This is uncommon, but in a few instances, interviewees suggest how through their religious buildings, they could register some resistance against the state. For example, religious buildings can become a symbol of resistance when they are perceived as potential bargaining chips. So for one Muslim interviewee,

> If the Masjid Sultan were to be demolished by the government, I don't think I'll vote for PAP.

Furthermore, another interviewee cited arguments in some quarters that religious authorities should not themselves close down religious buildings (for example, if they were underused) because that would be a signal to the state that the community itself did not consider the building to be sacred. The state could then, in another time and context, easily demolish the building and the community would not be able to defend it on the grounds of sacredness. In this sense, some religious buildings may have been kept standing not because they are needed but because they have become symbols of resistance to potential state power.

Given the changes the state effects on sacred places, an interesting comparison can be drawn with its attempts to adjust sacred time, which was met by considerable resistance and promptly retracted. In 1984, the Employment Act was amended such that the "work week" was redefined. A worker's rest day need no longer fall on a particular day (such as Sunday) but on any day of the week. This was a response to rapid changes in technology and in anticipation that lifestyles will change as companies operate round-the-clock and over weekends to maximise the returns on high technology investments. Mr Lim Boon Heng (then MP for Kebun Bahru) exhorted Singaporeans to adjust to such changing patterns of working hours, and called on "experts on religion" to take another look at the practice of having a specific

day in the week set aside for religious worship, so that when necessary, people could work on their "holy days". Reactions from the Catholic Archbishop and the Muslim Mufti were unequivocal. As the Archbishop Gregory Yong pointed out, "It is not possible to change the holy day just for the few who work. No matter what change in lifestyle, it will not affect the day of worship which is still Sunday." Similarly, the Mufti Syed Isa bin Mohammed Semait argued that "Each religion has its own holy day and no one in the world can change that. It is compulsory for a Muslim to keep that prayer time every Friday" (Straits Times, 14 September 1984). Since then, nothing more has been said publicly of adjusting holy days.

7.6 Ineffectual resistance: the missing links

Based on discussions in the previous section, it is clear that state actions, if opposed at all, have met ineffectual resistance. In this section, I examine some of the possible reasons why this may be so. They include, first, the role of the religious functionary in mediating between the state and individuals; second, the interpretation of the community as sacred; third, the lack of a co-ordinated voice on the part of the people; and fourth, the poor bargaining position that groups start off with.

First, religious functionaries, in particular, the Christian priests and pastors and Buddhist nuns interviewed, showed how they could help to prevent head-on clashes between the state and their followers. Specifically, their role rests on their ability to de-emphasise the sacredness of religious places. As I illustrated in section 7.3, the two Christian ministers and the Buddhist nun made it possible to accept the argument that religious buildings do not have a monopoly of sacredness. They spoke, for instance, of how sacredness is in God, in human beings and in the community. They

spoke too of how one could undergo a sacred experience at the seaside and while watching the sunset. They argued that the sense of a divine presence did not mean the place was in and of itself sacred. They also suggested that at the end of the day, all material things, including buildings, were transient and therefore unimportant. Because these religious leaders adopt such views, sometimes in line with their respective theological positions and at others reflecting their personal positions, they do not become the rallying point for resistance which they would otherwise quite naturally be. In the case of Hindus, the lack of such rallying points is received with frustration by some individuals. For example, Kumar spoke of how there are no mediatory channels between them and the state, because the official religious representatives (the Hindu Endowments Board and the Hindu Advisory Board) are "lame ducks" with "toothless title(s)" -- "they can't do anything."

Second, the view that the community itself is the real "temple" is important, because people then feel that as long as the community is not destroyed, they can cope with the loss of their places. This reflects Fried's (1965:367) findings in his study of the relocation of homes, where grief at having to move out is heightened when individuals have to leave their neighbours. Conversely, the grief and sense of loss is decreased when the community as a whole is moved. All this has implications for the degree of resistance. If sacredness is seen to reside in the community, the meanings attached to churches, temples and mosques are then devolved to a personal level. There is thus less likelihood of collective action to oppose demolition.

Third, the lack of a co-ordinated voice has sometimes also contributed to the lack of effective resistance to state power. This is best exemplified in the history of the Gothic chapel in the compounds of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. The schools and chapel in Victoria Street stood on expensive prime real estate, and the

land was acquired for redevelopment. The schools moved out in 1984 and some of the buildings were demolished while the French Gothic chapel stood with its exact fate unknown for a while. There was no doubt that a significant degree of public agreement existed that the chapel should remain. For example, ex-students of the schools interviewed by the press expressed a variety of opinions. Some felt it was a "symbol of solidarity to thousands of old girls." Others felt it a "pity to destroy the fine architecture." Some spoke of more personal moments: "We went there for consolation, during sadness or when we were happy. And as I stood there sometime last year in December I could feel these many emotions running through me as I recalled my school days" (quoted in Straits Times, 30 November 1981). However, despite such views and attachments, the state received no appeals against what was then likely demolition. The lack of a co-ordinated voice was because there was then no old-girls association which could speak on behalf of the many individuals who felt strongly about the chapel. In this particular instance, later consciousness about preservation saved the chapel from demolition. The URA undertook to preserve the building, but has since decided that it is not viable for them to do so. It has therefore invited commercial developers to undertake the project, while giving the assurance that they will see to the preservation of the general ambience of serenity in the chapel and its surrounding buildings. A petition has been circulated by the "old girls" to oppose the commercial development of the place and to appeal for the chapel to remain a religious place. The whole episode provides abundant case material for further research on questions of preservation, state power, commercial interests and personal meanings and values.

Fourth, the lack of effectual resistance can be attributed to the poor bargaining positions of those affected. As Simmie (1974:140) pointed out, groups with different beliefs may be prevented from taking up a valid bargaining position because the

power groups set the rules and the procedures. Hence, in the case of compulsory land acquisition for example, groups have no legal recourse because the Land Acquisition Act (1966) gives the government legal right to compulsorily acquire land. As I discussed in Chapter Three, landowners affected have no way of appealing against the decision to acquire their land, and the sole Appeals Board only considers appeals in relation to the compensation award, not to the decision to acquire. All this also reflects the wider political culture in Singapore which I outlined in Chapter Three, where there is little public participation in general policy making, and little resistance to policies and actions.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by spelling out in section 7.2 specific issues over which there are underlying tensions between state and religious groups. These include the ways in which the establishment, relocation, demolition and preservation of religious buildings can be potentially antagonistic. In section 7.3, I discussed how individuals have adapted the meanings and values of their religious places so that they can cope with the differential conceptions invested by the state. I then went on in section 7.4 to discuss specifically the role of the house as a religious and sacred place. In section 7.5, I examined instances of material and symbolic resistance to state actions, while in section 7.6, I explored the reasons why such resistance has been ineffectual. With this chapter, I have now presented all the empirical evidence in support of my central arguments. In the next and final chapter, I will draw together these arguments and reflect on the contributions of this study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Reflections

I have devoted this thesis to exploring the meanings and values of religious buildings for individuals and groups and to examining how these meanings and values are constrained by wider socio-political contexts. The particular setting within which I have worked is the multi-religious but officially secular state of Singapore. Specifically, I have discussed three main themes. I have examined the meanings and values of religious buildings for individuals of the major religious groups in Singapore: Muslims, Christians (both Catholics and non-Catholics), Hindus and Chinese religionists (both canonical Buddhists and syncretic Chinese religionists). I have also discussed the meanings and values which are invested in these same religious buildings by the state, as manifested in the policies and actions affecting their establishment, relocation, demolition and preservation. Finally, I have drawn these two levels of analysis together and explored the differences between the two levels, addressing some of the issues arising from conflicts between individual meanings and values and state policies and actions.

In this section, I will discuss the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of my study. At a theoretical level, my study has addressed four issues in common currency within cultural geography: the importance of individual meanings and values; the re-theorisation of "culture"; the agency-structure debate; and the analysis of landscape symbolism and meanings. With regard to the focus on individual meanings and values, I have emphasised the inadequacy of treating people as

"rational, economic persons" in decision-making models and have stressed the importance of understanding human beings as living and feeling individuals. This is a distinctively humanistic perspective which contrasts with the way human beings are treated within quantitative and positivistic geography. It also contrasts with traditional cultural geography's treatment of human beings as passive agents acting under the influence of a reified "culture".

While humanistic geography has encouraged a significant body of research, few geographers have taken this perspective in the study of religions. In fact, geographers of religion have fought shy of dealing with religion in relation to "real" people, evident in Sopher's (1967) and Levine's (1986) argument that geography cannot deal with personal religious experiences but must focus instead on institutionalised religious behaviour. Here, I have illustrated that geography can and should deal with personal religious experiences, particularly when such experiences are closely bound up with religious places. Questions such as the meanings of religious places for individuals and the experiences and feelings they undergo at these places fall within the geographer's metier. It is precisely these issues I address in Chapter Five. As I demonstrated, people invest a variety of meanings in religious buildings and experience a range of emotions at these places. They are sacred centres where concentrations of religious activities take place. They are places where one's god(s) may be found and where one may undergo a sacred experience. These sacred experiences include a gamut of emotions from serenity and protection to fear and the sense of being overwhelmed, some of which correspond to Otto's (1917) "numinous" and James' (1902) discussion of the varieties of religious experience. They are also centres of intense personal attachments and experiences, closely associated with special people and special times in one's life. Through these ties, people develop affective, topophilic bonds with their religious places. Put in another way, these places are

experienced as "emotional territory" (Ittelson et al., 1976:204) and "existential space" (Matore, 1966). Indeed, these secular bonds are often of such strength and significance that they gather "sacred" meaning as well, though of a non-religious kind. With the exception of traditional syncretic Chinese religionists, adherents agree that their religious places are also social centres where they can gather and meet friends and relatives. They are places where social bonds are forged and developed. In addition, religious places are symbols of the interactions and divisions between members of the different religious groups in a multi-religious country like Singapore, evident in the varying extents to which respondents had any contact with other religious buildings.

A second theoretical issue in the thesis is cultural geographers' re-theorisation of the concept of "culture". As I showed in Chapter Two, cultural geographers have tended to treat "culture" as a superorganic entity with causal powers and as a homogeneous and consensual entity. Some now recognise it is inadequate to thus reify culture and ignore the plurality of cultural groups in any one society (Duncan, 1980; Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Jackson, 1989). In a similar vein, existing empirical studies of religion have tended to treat religion as a transcendental category and as an unseen force shaping landscapes and spatial patterns. My treatment of "religion" parallels the wider re-theorisation of "culture" in several ways. I have resisted reification by dealing with religious groups and individuals rather than "religion" and to address more specifically the component parts of religion -- practices, experiences, meanings and beliefs. I have also considered the plurality of cultural groups in Singapore society. In this respect, I have concentrated mainly on two groups: the secular, political culture on the one hand, and religious "culture" on the other. The ways in which the political and cultural come together in the allocation of meanings to religious places, the negotiations of meanings involved, the ideological hegemony and the material and symbolic strategies of resistance have all been discussed primarily in

Chapters Six and Seven. In addition, the multiplicity of religious groups in Singapore has also been taken into consideration and while I have focused principally on the similarities between individuals of the various religious groups, I have also highlighted differences where they were apparent.

Third, my study is an empirical microcosm of the wider theoretical debates about agency and structure. By recognising the plurality of cultural groups and in particular, the role of the secular state in influencing religious landscapes, I have resisted a purely humanistic stance which places individuals at the centre of inquiry and ignores context and constraints. As I illustrated in Chapter Six, the state's various policies guide the establishment, relocation, demolition and preservation of religious buildings, thus setting the context and constraints within which individuals interact with their religious places. As I further discussed in Chapter Seven, it is within this context that the meanings and values which individuals invest are negotiated and adapted. The specific forms of negotiation and adaptation are varied: people rationalise their sacred experiences, invest in alternative notions of sacredness and sacred places, imbibe the ideology put forth by the state, find refuge in religious teachings and some even actively resist the actions of the state. What this illustrates is the inadequacy of polarising choice and constraint as abstract, static categories. Rather, this thesis has attempted to show how action and structure are mutually reinforcing in particular settings, and in everyday life, individuals are caught up in a process of making choices within the wider constraints agreed or imposed by society.

Fourth, this study has illustrated the prime importance of looking beyond the material level to understand the symbolic meanings of actions and places. Beyond the material acts of providing religious sites, demolishing, relocating or preserving

religious buildings, and the regular acts of going to church, temple or mosque, there are symbolic meanings which need to be deciphered. To understand these symbolic meanings for individuals as well as the state, I have illustrated how both humanist and structuralist perspectives are useful. While the former includes the analysis of symbolic meanings and values which individuals invest in their religious places, the latter involves an analysis of the institutional structures within which such meanings are defined. In both senses, my study contributes to the increasing body of research which recognises the symbolism of the built environment (see, for example, Duncan and Duncan, 1988; Cosgrove, 1989).

Methodologically, I have demonstrated the advantages of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to obtain different types of information, and to corroborate information obtained from one source with that derived from another. The questionnaire survey provided me with extensive and broad-based data, showing patterns of worship for different groups. Some data from the survey also provided initial insights into the meanings and values invested in specific places of worship but such data were not sufficiently detailed and personal to evoke the meanings that people attach to place. In-depth interviews, on the other hand, allowed me to probe the details of place attachments and religious experiences. Although anthropologists and sociologists have used qualitative methods for a long time, geographers have fought shy of them in the search for quantification, replicability, statistical analysis and "objectivity". Here, I have shown that when dealing with intangibles such as meanings and values, it is appropriate to adopt qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews. Additionally, as my subsequent discussions of policy implications will show, qualitative research is also useful for yielding information that is of practical value. As Walker (1985:19) argued,

> What qualitative research can offer the policy maker is a theory of social

> action grounded on the experiences -- the world view -- of those likely to be affected by a policy decision or thought to be part of the problem.

Apart from the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, another combinatorial approach was adopted to examine the state's conceptions of religious places and its roles in shaping religious landscapes. Archival research provided many details about the official policies pertaining to religion and land use planning but to understand the rationale behind some of these policies required interviews with policy-makers themselves. Hence, in summary, I stress the potential of using a multiple-method strategy in which different methods provide different kinds of data. These various methods can yield information which are mutually reinforcing; they are best seen as complementary tools rather than competing alternatives.

From my analysis of the empirical information collected, practical policy implications arise which may be divided into three main areas. These have to do with multi-culturalism and equality of treatment; urban redevelopment; and the appropriation of religious buildings by the tourism industry (including those which are in current use and those which are not).

First, history and geography have to a large extent created the present situation in which Muslims are accorded a special position in Singapore. The state gives practical recognition to this special position in a number of policies. However, this apparent "favouritism" is beginning to arouse negative reactions from other groups, who feel that the principle of multi-culturalism has not been adhered to. While some Malays/Muslims feel that there is a degree of discrimination against them in terms of opportunities in the job market for instance (Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, 12 May 1990), other communities perceive the reverse to be sometimes true: that is, the Malays/Muslims are in fact recipients of positive discrimination by the state.

Perhaps the time has come when Singaporeans of the various communitiés feel that they are as "indigenous" to Singapore as the original Malay community, and that there is no longer any reason why one group should be favoured above another. Should the state continue to discriminate in favour of the Muslim (and the Malay) community at the risk of alienating other groups; or should it persuade and encourage the Malay/Muslim community they no longer need their "special position" to ensure their interests are protected? The latter would do far more in terms of defusing potential discord between the various communities. It would also allow Malays and Muslims to "'stand tall with the other races' and be regarded as equal members of society", to use the words of the President of the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union, Mr Ma'mun Suheimi (Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, 12 May 1990). In fact, it does seem as if steps are being taken in this direction, in the sense that the state is beginning to persuade the Malay/Muslim community to relinquish some of the privileges they have been accorded, and to work as a community towards solving some of their own problems without help from the state. For example, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has proposed setting up an organisation, led by Malay professionals and without participation by any Malay Members of Parliament or Government ministers, to tackle the community's problems (Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, 13 October 1990). This is therefore a transitional period; one in which schemes may be introduced which prove unpopular with sections of the Malay/Muslim community because they feel their Constitutional rights are being denied them. Yet, these steps are necessary if the state wishes to maintain the long-term harmony between communities, and for the Malay/Muslim community to feel they are regarded as equal members of society.

A second major finding of this study is that people invest intense personal and shared emotions in their religious places. These feelings are sacred, personal as well as social. However, the state has always approached urban renewal in a spirit of

"rational pragmatism" in which emotions and social and spiritual values play no part. This has led to the demolition and relocation of individual buildings and neighbourhoods in order to make the most "efficient" use of available space. Yet renewal of a city, as Walter (1988:3) pointed out, is not merely physical reconstruction -- "demolishing slums and replacing them with new buildings." Treating renewal as such risks a "degradation of feeling and meaning". Urban renewal must also include conservation and rehabilitation. As I have indicated in Chapter Three, conservation has only very recently emerged on the agenda of urban planners in Singapore, and primarily for historical and architectural reasons. Such efforts are laudable but there is also a need for a greater sensitivity to the meanings and values which people invest in places. These, as I have indicated, are often sacred, personal and social. Given increasing recognition of the importance of conservation, planners in Singapore are now well-placed to include the social and personal values of place users in their evaluations and decisions. In practical planning terms, this would mean finding out what people want of their environments and discussing options with them. As far as possible, demolition and rebuilding should be used as an absolute last resort. This will diminish the amount of drastic redevelopment, the consequent mass demolition of buildings and wholesale dislocation from treasured places. Should demolition and relocation be necessary, assistance may be rendered in the form of suitable alternative sites. What is eventually built on the site of a demolished and relocated religious building is also important. Generally, people are better able to accept their loss if the replacement building is of some community benefit, such as a school, library or a public housing project. These can be justified on the grounds of betterment for the community. On the other hand, exclusive private property developments are far less acceptable, as are clubhouses for the economic elite, or even some community amenity regarded as "frivolous" (such as a swimming pool) by comparison to a sacred place. Furthermore, just as it would help when resettling

neighbourhoods to keep the community together in a new destination that is not too far away and not too different, the same could be said when relocating churches, temples and mosques. As I indicated in Chapter Seven, congregations who are kept together feel that the community (the "real temple" of God) is intact, and are better able to cope with the locational change. It is also highly likely that they would be better able to accept the change if they are able to relocate within the general area, instead of having to move to another part of the island. All this parallels a recent call by Choo (1988) for a more "humanist" view of urban renewal in Singapore, in which there may be a greater willingness to

> plan for 'urban renewability' and to dismantle the 'tight plan' approach of the last decades, making it possible to balance equity and efficiency planning criteria, to resolve people- versus place-centered design conflicts, and to reconcile change and continuity in urban forms and community structures (Choo, 1988:i).

A third finding is that in many countries, religious buildings are part of historical heritage and represent unrivalled architectural wonders. For this reason, many have become tourist attractions. One needs only to look to St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London; the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican; and the Borobudur in central Java. By comparison, Singapore's churches, temples and mosques are modest but, within the local context, they exemplify local architectural and historical heritage. The Singapore Tourist Promotion Board has in many ways appropriated these buildings and promoted them as tourist sites for visitors, just as it promotes religious festivals as tourist events. This should only be done with the consent of religious groups and religious leaders, who should have the prerogative to define the nature of tourism. For example, they may wish their religious buildings to be out-of-bounds to tourists when worship is going on, or tour groups which bring visitors in large numbers may be limited to certain numbers at any one time. They may even wish to deny access to tourists altogether. If these places are to be

promoted as tourist attractions, effective management must include the co-operation of religious authorities and congregations. In this way, the power to define places is held primarily by those whose patterns of worship and in some cases, whose desired privacy during worship, are most directly affected.

8.2 Directions for further research

While my research has contributed to current theoretical and methodological debates and raised some implications for policy, the general field of religious geography and the more specific context of Singapore is far from exhausted in terms of research possibilities. Indeed, at many junctures in the researching and writing of this thesis, various issues arose which suggested the possibilities for further research projects. In this final section, I will raise three main issues: the first centres on "geographies of resistance"; the second relates to issues of heritage and conservation; and the third focuses on the notion of "community".

First, the explicit attention currently paid to cultural politics within cultural geography highlights issues of ideology, hegemony, domination, negotiation and resistance. Within this broader framework, a case may be made for the study of "geographies of resistance" in which the political, cultural and symbolic strategies of subordinate groups to resist the domination of another group(s) may be examined. In the context of religious geography in Singapore, there are two potential areas in which these issues can be examined. First, the forms of adaptations, emotional adjustments and strategies of resistance expressed by particular groups whose religious buildings are either being relocated or demolished could be examined more closely through specific case studies. This would allow for a closer scrutiny of the resources

on which these groups draw for support and/or opposition. It would also allow for an understanding of how a community organises itself and the respective roles of religious functionaries, lay leaders and ordinary adherents when faced with such situations. Second, studies could also be done on religious festivals, not only in terms of their cultural symbolism, but also in terms of their social and political significance. For example, the religious symbolism of processional routes could be examined alongside other political issues: the policing of festivals and processions; the spatial "strategies" of containment exercised by authorities; and the manner of resistance, co-operation and/or negotiations by participants and religious leaders.

Second, buildings that are not relocated or demolished may be conserved as part of the local heritage. In the European context, heritage and conservation issues have been widely discussed and studied (Lowenthal and Binney, 1981; Lowenthal, 1985; Wright, 1985; and Hewison, 1987). However, as I have shown in Chapter Three, it is only recently that conservation has gained some recognition as an important component of urban growth in Singapore. With the dawning realisation that the past is worth conserving, it would be worth examining more closely a series of heritage and conservation-related issues in the context of Singapore. For example, who decides which buildings are to be preserved? What are the criteria and who sets these criteria? For what reasons are these buildings being preserved? How are communities affected? How are they consulted, if at all? In Chapter Seven, I cited the case of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus chapel in Victoria Street and its changing fortunes in terms of conservation. It offers abundant potential as a case study in which analysis of the preceding themes can be carried out.

While buildings may be preserved for their architectural and historical value, it would be well to recall that religious buildings house congregations for whom the

place holds a variety of meanings and values. In line with "community" studies of the urban anthropological tradition (see Hannerz, 1980), it may be worthwhile to examine more closely the concept of community in relation to a religious congregation and to analyse the relationships within such a group. Specifically, my empirical evidence suggests that the Catholic parish was more than a cartographic boundary in that people identified themselves as "belonging" to a particular parish. Further investigation could be initiated to study the extent to which the Catholic parish is a source of community. At the same time, this could be compared to other groups for whom no such formal boundaries exist.

8.3 Epilogue

In this dissertation, I have explored the contemporary meanings and values for religious buildings in Singapore. Through this specific empirical research, I have sought to make two general statements -- about people and about landscapes. First, I wish to re-assert the importance to geography of paying attention to "real" people -- their feelings, the places they value, the attachments they form, the meanings they invest. In other words, individuals matter! This was the precise call of humanistic geography which somehow got lost in the general excitement of structural Marxism and semiotic analysis in the 1980s. At the same time, my study also emphasises the importance of studying individuals and their place meanings within the contexts of their everyday lives, which necessitates a consideration of the socio-political milieux within which their lives are set.

My study also suggests that landscapes do not have a single meaning. Instead, they are imbued with multiple meanings, not only by different individuals and

groups, but also by the same individual. These meanings may be overlapping but they may also be contradictory. Sometimes, certain groups have greater power than others to enforce their chosen meanings; at others, meanings are negotiated between groups; at yet other times, domination is met with resistance, which can be overtly political or cultural and symbolic. These complexities attest to the view that the production and consumption of landscapes is never "innocent", being political in the broadest sense of the term.

Holding on to these central notions of people and landscapes, my agenda for contemporary cultural geography consists of several elements. It borrows from humanistic geography the emphasis on individuals, their environmental experiences and their place meanings. It also shares with cultural studies and sociology the concerns with cultural politics and the social cleavages arising from different race, class, gender and local "community" interests. This study is an example of empirical work within this agenda because I have paid close attention to the individual while not forgetting the wider dimensions of cultural politics. Although this agenda clearly cannot be all things to all people, what it does offer is a means by which we can appreciate the meanings of places for individuals, a way to examine the wider political contexts within which individuals are situated and an opportunity for a fuller appreciation of the relationships between agency and structure, society and space.

APPENDIX A1: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

Hello,

I am from the National University of Singapore and am conducting a survey on religious patterns in Singapore. Would you give me about 20 minutes of your time to answer some questions on your religious practices? ... What is your religion? (If no religion, or any religion other than the main ones, thank and abort.)

FOR THE INTERVIEWER:

Name of interviewer : _____ Date: _____

Address of respondent:

Street : _____

Block : _____

: _____

For negative responses :

Reason for non-response : Not in 1
Unwilling 2
No religion 3
Other religion 4

For positive responses:

Language of interview:
English 1
Mandarin 2
Hokkien 3
Teochew 4
Cantonese 5
Malay 6
Tamil 7
Others (specify : _____) 8

Sex of respondent : Male 1 Female 2

Housetype:
HDB 1-room 1
HDB 2-room 2
HDB 3-room 3
HDB 4-room 4
HDB 5-room 5
HDB executive 6
HUDC flat 7
Private flat 8
Private house 9

Member of household interviewed :

Husband	1	Son-in-law	6
Wife	2	Grandfather	7
Daughter	3	Grandmother	8
Son	4	Others	
Daughter-in-law	5	(specify: _____)	9

Comments on quality of interview :

_____

_____

"I'd like to begin by asking for some background information about yourself."

1. Age :

15 - 19 years	1
20 - 29 years	2
30 - 39 years	3
40 - 49 years	4
50 - 59 years	5
60 and above	6

2. Ethnic group :

Chinese	1
Malay	2
Indian	3
Others (specify: _____)	4

3. Education level :

No education	1
Primary education	2
Secondary education	3
Pre-university education	4
Tertiary education	5
Others (specify : _____)	6

4. Occupation:

Professional & technical	01
Administrative & managerial	02
Clerical	03
Sales	04
Services	05
Production & related	06
Housewife	07
Student	08
Unemployed	09
Others	10

5. How long have you lived in this flat/house?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4

6. How long have you lived in this area?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4

7. Language most commonly spoken :

English	1
Mandarin	2
Chinese dialect (specify : _____)	3
Malay	4
Tamil	5
Others (specify : _____)	6

8. What is your religion?

Islam	1
Hinduism	2
Chinese religion (specify : _____)	3
Catholicism	4
Other Christian (specify : _____)	5

9. How long have you been a Christian/Muslim?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4
Since birth (Go to Q. 12)	5

10. Did you convert from another religion?

Yes (Go to Q. 11)	1
No (Go to Q. 12)	2

11. Which religion did you convert from?

Islam	1
Hinduism	2
Chinese religion (specify : _____)	3
Catholicism	4
Other Christian (specify : _____)	5
Others (specify: _____)	6

12. Religious affiliation of other household members, (i.e. normally resident in this flat/house), aged 10 years and above: (Tick the appropriate columns and rows)

Relationship to respondent	Muslim	Hindu	Chinese religionist	Catholic	Other Christian	Others	No religion
Father	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mother	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Spouse	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sibling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sibling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sibling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Others (specify)							
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

13. Are you a member of any religious organisation?
(e.g. Legion of Mary; church choir; mosque management committee)

No	1
Yes	2

(specify: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____)

"Now, I'd like to find out more about your visits to your church/mosque..."

14. How often do you go to the church/mosque?

Never (Go to Q. 23)	0
More than once a week	1
Once a week	2
Once every 2-3 weeks	3
Once every month	4
On a few occasions a year or less	5

15. Who do you usually go to church/mosque with?

Alone	1
Immediate family	2
Other relatives	3
Friend(s)	4
Neighbours	5
Others (specify: _____)	6

16. How much time do you usually spend in the church/mosque on each visit?

Less than half an hour	1
Half to 1 hour	2
1 to 2 hours	3
2 to 3 hours	4
3 to 4 hours	5
4 to 5 hours	6
More than 5 hours	7

17. Which church/mosque do you worship at most regularly?

_____

18. Where is it?

_____

19. How long have you been a regular worshipper at your present church/mosque?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4

20. How did you first know of your present church/mosque?

Through friends	1
Through family	2
Through relatives	3
Through school	4
Part of the neighbourhood	5
Others (specify: _____)	6

21. Why do you go to this particular church/mosque? Below are a list of possible reasons. Please tell me 'yes' or 'no' to each of them.

	Yes	No
Nearby	___	___
Family goes there	___	___
Friends go there	___	___
Priest/imam	___	___
Others (specify : _____)		

22. What do you do in the church/mosque usually? Below are a list of possible activities. Please tell me 'yes' or 'no' to each of them.

	Yes	No
Pray privately	___	___
Attend service/mass	___	___
Attend ceremony (e.g. wedding)	___	___
Attend religious course	___	___
To talk to priest/nun/imam	___	___
To meet other people	___	___

Others (specify :) _____

"I would like now to find out about other places where you pray besides the church/mosque."

23. Where else do you pray apart from the church/mosque?

	Yes	No	
Nowhere else	___	___	(Skip Q. 24 - 26)
At home	___	___	
At work	___	___	
In school	___	___	

Others (specify:) _____

24. Where at home do you pray? Below are a list of possible places. Please tell me 'yes' or 'no' to each of them.

	Yes	No
At an altar	___	___
In the living room	___	___
In the bedroom	___	___
In the kitchen	___	___

Others (specify : _____)

25. How often do you pray at home?

More than once a week	1
Once a week	2
Once every 2-3 weeks	3
Once every month	4
On a few occasions a year or less	5

26. Why do you pray at home?

_____

_____

_____

[Prompt only if necessary : is it more convenient? Quick? Because of commitments at home e.g. looking after children/aged ?]

"I'd like to turn now to some questions on places of worship in Singapore..."

28. Here are a set of photographs of some places of worship for different religious groups. As we go through them one by one, can you please tell me if you have gone to each of them for any of the following reasons? Tell me 'yes' or 'no' as I read the reasons out in turn for each of the places.

[For the interviewer:
1. If the respondent's regular temple(s) is/are in the list below, leave it/them out.]
2. Preface each section with the question : "Have you been into a mosque/church/temple (as appropriate) before? If the answer is 'no', that particular section can be left out.
3. Hand the respondent the album and instruct him/her to flip through it page by page as the names are read out in turn.]

Mosques	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To attend a prayer session	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes*
Sultan Mosque (North Bridge Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Masjid Darussalam (Commonwealth Ave. West)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Masjid Tentera Di-Raja (Clementi Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Others :						
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—

* Use these codes to indicate if respondents had gone to the respective destinations before or after conversion:

1. Before conversion
2. After conversion
3. Both before and after conversion
4. Not applicable (for those who have not converted)

Churches	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To attend service/ mass	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes*
St Andrew's Cathedral (Coleman Street)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Cathedral of Good Shepherd (Queen Street)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Novena Church (Thomson Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Church of the Holy Cross (Clementi Avenue 1)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
St John's-St Margaret's (Dover Avenue)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Others :						
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—

Chinese temples	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Bright Hill Temple (Bright Hill Drive)	—	—	—	_____	—
Siong Lim See (Jalan Toa Payoh)	—	—	—	_____	—
Thian Hock Keng (Telok Ayer Street)	—	—	—	_____	—
Kuan Yin Temple (Waterloo Street)	—	—	—	_____	—
Tse Tho Aum (Sin Ming Drive)	—	—	—	_____	—
Giok Hiong Tian (Havelock Road)	—	—	—	_____	—
Kusu Island Temple	—	—	—	_____	—
Others :					
_____	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	_____	—

Hindu Temples	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To attend puja	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Sri Srinivasa Perumal (Serangoon Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Sri Sivan (Serangoon Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Sri Mariamman (South Bridge Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Sri Thendayuthapani (Tank Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Others :						
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—

Chinese temples	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Central Sikh Temple (Towner Road)	—	—	—	_____	—
Others :					
_____	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	_____	—

"Finally, I would like to know your opinion ..."

29. To what extent do you think religion is important in your life?

Very important	1
Important	2
Quite important	3
Not important	4
Depends on the phases in my life	5

30. Can you tell me more about why that is so?

_____

_____

****

[Ask this of potential 2nd stage interviewees:]

This questionnaire forms the first part of a larger research project. The second part consists of interviews with members of different religious groups to find out views on religious buildings and practices. Would you be interested to participate in the second stage?

If so, could you please give me your name and telephone number so that I can contact you again.

Name : _____

Tel. No. : _____

**** THANK YOU ****

APPENDIX A2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHINESE RELIGIONISTS AND HINDUS

Hello,

I am from the National University of Singapore and am conducting a survey on religious patterns in Singapore. Would you give me about 20 minutes of your time to answer some questions on your religious practices? ... What is your religion? (If no religion, or any religion other than the main ones, thank and abort.)

FOR THE INTERVIEWER:

Name of interviewer : _____ Date: _____

Address of respondent:

Street : _____

Block : _____

: _____

For negative responses :

Reason for non-response :	Not in	1
	Unwilling	2
	No religion	3
	Other religion	4

For positive responses:

Language of interview:	English	1
	Mandarin	2
	Hokkien	3
	Teochew	4
	Cantonese	5
	Malay	6
	Tamil	7
	Others (specify : _____)	8

Sex of respondent : Male 1 Female 2

Housetype:	HDB 1-room	1	HDB executive	6
	HDB 2-room	2	HUDC flat	7
	HDB 3-room	3	Private flat	8
	HDB 4-room	4	Private house	9
	HDB 5-room	5		

Member of household interviewed :

Husband	1	Son-in-law	6
Wife	2	Grandfather	7
Daughter	3	Grandmother	8
Son	4	Others	
Daughter-in-law	5	(specify: _____)	9

Comments on quality of interview :

_____

_____

"I'd like to begin by asking for some background information about yourself."

1. Age :

15 - 19 years	1
20 - 29 years	2
30 - 39 years	3
40 - 49 years	4
50 - 59 years	5
60 and above	6

2. Ethnic group :

Chinese	1
Malay	2
Indian	3
Others (specify: _____)	4

3. Education level :

No education	1
Primary education	2
Secondary education	3
Pre-university education	4
Tertiary education	5
Others (specify : _____)	6

4. Occupation:

Professional & technical	01
Administrative & managerial	02
Clerical	03
Sales	04
Services	05
Production & related	06
Housewife	07
Student	08
Unemployed	09
Others	10

5. How long have you lived in this flat/house?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4

6. How long have you lived in this area?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4

7. Language most commonly spoken :

English	1
Mandarin	2
Chinese dialect (specify : _____)	3
Malay	4
Tamil	5
Others (specify : _____)	6

8. What is your religion?

Islam	1
Hinduism	2
Chinese religion (specify : _____)	3
Catholicism	4
Other Christian (specify : _____)	5

9. How long have you been a Chinese religionist/Hindu?

Less than a year	1
Between 1 and 5 years	2
Between 5 and 10 years	3
More than 10 years	4
Since birth (Go to Q. 12)	5

10. Did you convert from another religion?

Yes (Go to Q. 11)	1
No (Go to Q. 12)	2

11. Which religion did you convert from?

Islam	1
Hinduism	2
Chinese religion (specify : _____)	3
Catholicism	4
Other Christian (specify : _____)	5
Others (specify: _____)	6

12. Religious affiliation of other household members, (i.e. normally resident in this flat/house), aged 10 years and above: (Tick the appropriate columns and rows)

Relationship to respondent	Muslim	Hindu	Chinese religionist	Catholic	Other Christian	Others	No religion
Father	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mother	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Spouse	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sibling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sibling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sibling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Others (specify)							
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
_____	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

13. Are you a member of any religious organisation?
(e.g. temple management committee; religious music group)

No	1
Yes	2

(specify: _____

_____)

"Now, I'd like to find out more about your visits to your temple ...

14. How often do you go to the temple?

Never (Go to Q. 24)	0
More than once a week	1
Once a week	2
Once every 2-3 weeks	3
Once every month	4
On a few occasions a year or less	5

15. Who do you usually go to temple with?

Alone	1
Immediate family	2
Other relatives	3
Friend(s)	4
Neighbours	5
Others (specify: _____)	6

16. How much time do you usually spend in the temple on each visit?

Less than half an hour	1
Half to 1 hour	2
1 to 2 hours	3
2 to 3 hours	4
3 to 4 hours	5
4 to 5 hours	6
More than 5 hours	7

17. How many temple(s) do you worship at most regularly?

_____

18. Which temple(s) do you worship at most regularly?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

19. Where is it (are they)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

20. How long have you been a frequent worshipper at your present temple(s)?

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
Less than a year	—	—	—	—	—	1
Between 1 and 5 years	—	—	—	—	—	2
Between 5 and 10 years	—	—	—	—	—	3
More than 10 years	—	—	—	—	—	4

21. How did you first know of your present temple(s)? (Repeat the names of each of the temples in turn if appropriate.)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Through friends	___	___	___	___	___
Through family	___	___	___	___	___
Through relatives	___	___	___	___	___
Through school	___	___	___	___	___
Part of the neighbourhood	___	___	___	___	___

Others (specify:) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

22. Why do you go to this/these particular temple(s)? Below are a list of possible reasons. Please tell me 'yes' or 'no' to each of them. (If appropriate, we will deal at each of the temples you go to in turn. For the first one (name it), is it because .....) [Tick as many reasons as appropriate for each temple.]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Nearby	___	___	___	___	___
Family goes there	___	___	___	___	___
Friends go there	___	___	___	___	___
Priest/Monk/nun	___	___	___	___	___
Particular deity	___	___	___	___	___
Others (specify :)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

23. What do you do in the temple(s) usually? Below are a list of possible activities. Please tell me 'yes' or 'no' to each of them.

	Yes	No
Pray privately	___	___
Attend service/mass	___	___
Attend ceremony (e.g. wedding)	___	___
Attend religious course	___	___
To talk to priest/nun/imam	___	___
To meet other people	___	___

Others (specify :) _____

_____

"I would like now to find out about other places where you pray besides the temple."

24. Where else do you pray apart from the temple?

	Yes	No	
Nowhere else	___	___	(Skip Q. 25 - 27)
At home	___	___	
At work	___	___	
In school	___	___	

Others (specify:) _____

25. Where at home do you pray? Below are a list of possible places. Please tell me 'yes' or 'no' to each of them.

	Yes	No
At an altar	___	___
In the living room	___	___
In the bedroom	___	___
In the kitchen	___	___

Others (specify : _____)

26. How often do you pray at home?

More than once a week	1
Once a week	2
Once every 2-3 weeks	3
Once every month	4
On a few occasions a year or less	5

27. Why do you pray at home?

_____

_____

_____

[Prompt only if necessary : is it more convenient? Quick? Because of commitments at home e.g. looking after children/aged ?]

"I'd like to turn now to some questions on places of worship in Singapore..."

28. Here are a set of photographs of some places of worship for different religious groups. As we go through them one by one, can you please tell me if you have gone to each of them for any of the following reasons? Tell me 'yes' or 'no' as I read the reasons out in turn for each of the places.

[For the interviewer:
1. If the respondent's regular temple(s) is/are in the list below, leave it/them out.]
2. Preface each section with the question : "Have you been into a mosque/church/temple (as appropriate) before? If the answer is 'no', that particular section can be left out.
3. Hand the respondent the album and instruct him/her to flip through it page by page as the names are read out in turn.]

Mosques	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To attend a prayer session	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes*
Sultan Mosque (North Bridge Road)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Masjid Darussalam (Commonwealth Ave. West)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Masjid Tentera Di-Raja (Clementi Road)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Others :						
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___

*Use these codes to indicate if respondents had gone to the respective destinations before or after conversion:

1. Before conversion
2. After conversion
3. Both before and after conversion
4. Not applicable

Churches	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To attend service/ mass	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
St Andrew's Cathedral (Coleman Street)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Cathedral of Good Shepherd (Queen Street)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Novena Church (Thomson Road)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Church of the Holy Cross (Clementi Avenue 1)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
St John's-St Margaret's (Dover Avenue)	—	—	—	—	_____	—
Others :						
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—
_____	—	—	—	—	_____	—

Chinese temples	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Bright Hill Temple (Bright Hill Drive)	—	—	—	_____	—
Siong Lim See (Jalan Toa Payoh)	—	—	—	_____	—
Thian Hock Keng (Telok Ayer Street)	—	—	—	_____	—
Kuan Yin Temple (Waterloo Street)	—	—	—	_____	—
Tse Tho Aum (Sin Ming Drive)	—	—	—	_____	—
Giok Hiong Tian (Havelock Road)	—	—	—	_____	—
Kusu Island Temple	—	—	—	_____	—

Chinese temples	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Others :					
_____	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	_____	___

Hindu Temples	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To attend puja	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Sri Srinivasa Perumal (Serangoon Road)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Sri Sivan (Serangoon Road)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Sri Mariamman (South Bridge Road)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Sri Thendayuthapani (Tank Road)	___	___	___	___	_____	___
Others :						
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	___	_____	___

Other places	To visit & look around	To attend ceremonies	To pray privately	Others (specify)	Codes
Central Sikh Temple (Towner Road)	___	___	___	_____	___
Others :					
_____	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	_____	___
_____	___	___	___	_____	___

"Finally, I would like to know your opinion ..."

29. To what extent do you think religion is important in your life?

Very important	1
Important	2
Quite important	3
Not important	4
Depends on the phases in my life	5

30. Can you tell me more about why that is so?

_____

_____

****

[Ask this of potential 2nd stage interviewees:]

This questionnaire forms the first part of a larger research project. The second part consists of interviews with members of different religious groups to find out views on religious buildings and practices. Would you be interested to participate in the second stage?

If so, could you please give me your name and telephone number so that I can contact you again.

Name : _____

Tel. No. : _____

**** THANK YOU ****

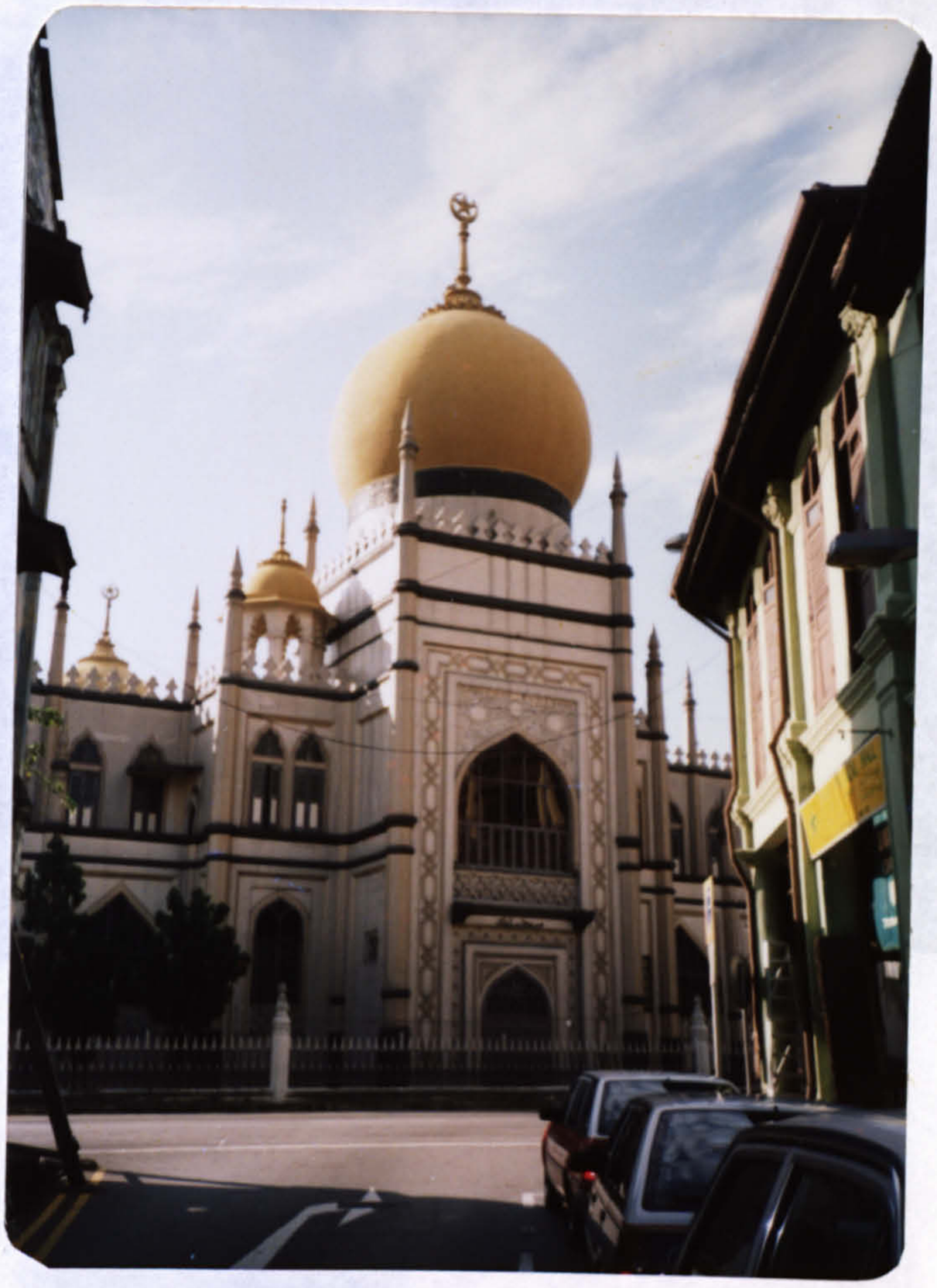

Plate A.1 Masjid Sultan

Plate A.2 Masjid Darussalam

Plate A.3 Masjid Tentera Diraja

Plate A.4 St Andrew's Cathedral

Plate A.5 Cathedral of the Good Shepherd

Plate A.6 Novena Church

Plate A.7 Church of the Holy Cross

Plate A.8 St John's-St Margaret's Church

Plate A.9 Bright Hill Temple (Phor Kark See) (1)

Plate A.10 Bright Hill Temple (Phor Kark See) (2)

Plate A.11 Siong Lim Temple

Plate A.12 Thian Hock Keng

Plate A.13 Kuan Yin Temple

Plate A.14 Tse Tho Aum

Plate A.15 Giok Hong Tian

Plate A.16 Chinese temple at Kusu Island

Plate A.17 Sri Srinivasa Perumal

Plate A.18 Sri Sivan

Plate A.19 Sri Mariamman

Plate A.20 Sri Thendayuthapani

Plate A.21 Central Sikh Temple

APPENDIX B: THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY: FIELDWORK STRATEGY

(A) BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area (which for convenience I term the "Clementi" area) consists mainly of Clementi New Town, a public housing estate, as well as the surrounding private estates. It is located within the south-western part of Singapore, about eleven to thirteen kilometres from the Central Business District. Clementi New Town itself was constructed mainly between 1975 and 1976 by the HDB (Housing and Development Board Annual Report, 1975/76:58; 1976/77:25) and consists of 184 residential blocks of public flats, separated into seven neighbourhoods. All housing units in these blocks were included in the initial sampling frame. In addition, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC) flats at Pine Grove Estate to the north-east of Clementi New Town (established in the early 1980s) were also included, as were the private houses of the "Sunset area" (Sunset Way, Sunset Grove, Sunset Place etc) to its north. Other private houses and flats in the West Coast area to the west of Clementi New Town were also included (for example the private houses in West Coast Grove, West Coast Avenue, and West Coast Lane; as well as the condominiums such as Parkview Condominium, Hong Leong Garden Condominium and Westpeak). Many of the private houses originated in the 1960s while the condominiums were established from the early 1980s onwards.

Clementi New Town occupies about 430 hectares of land, and when combined with the other estates nearby, the total land area reaches up to about 550 hectares. In terms of population, Clementi New Town alone has approximately 24 000 dwelling units and about 103 000 persons; with the private and HUDC areas included, a very rough estimate could bring the total up to 120 000 persons.

This area was selected because it fit the criteria I had set out. Specifically, the population profile in Clementi reflects the national profile quite closely, for example, in terms of ethnic composition, age profile, number of persons per household, number of persons per house, number of working persons per household, percentage of multi-lingual persons and dependency ratio (Table B.1). It is also possible to find different socio-economic groups living in close proximity (as reflected in the different housetypes, from HDB one room flats to private houses and flats) and this provides a useful stratifying variable for the study. Clementi is also an established estate where there has been little upheaval or change over the last few years.

(B) SELECTING THE RESPONDENTS: SAMPLING PROCEDURE

In selecting the respondents, stratified sampling was adopted such that the proportions of religious and socio-economic groups in the sample reflected the distribution in the national population. With the necessary adjustments (since those with other and no religions were not included in this study), the eventual sample size by religious group is summarised in Table B.2.

In several studies (for example, Kuo and Quah, 1988; Sng and You, 1982), it was found that a relationship existed between religion and socio-economic status. The sample was thus also stratified to reflect this, using housetype as an index of socio-economic status. Table B.3 illustrates the breakdown of respondents by religion and housetype. Once the numbers were worked out, it was possible to go ahead with a random sample to reflect this breakdown. First, it was necessary to construct a sampling frame consisting ideally of five lists of names and corresponding addresses, one for each religious group represented here. Unfortunately, that was not available

Table B.1: Parallels between national and sample population

Variable	National Population	Sample Population
Mean size of household	4.7	4.7
Mean number of persons per house	5.24	5.24
Mean number of working persons per household	2.13	2.13
Dependency ratio	45.5	45.5
Percentage of multi-lingual persons	37.5%	37.5%
Ethnic composition		
Chinese	75.8%	50.0-79.9%
Malay	15.3%	15.0-29.9%
Indian	6.5%	4.0-9.9%
Others	2.4%	2.0-7.9%

(Source: Humphrey, 1985:57, 67, 70, 73, 76, 104, 163, 146, 149)

Table B.2: The questionnaire survey: Sample size by religious groups

Religion	Actual proportion in national population	Proportion in sample	Sample size
Chinese religion	41.7%	45.6%	228
Catholic	7.6%	11.6%	58
Other Christian	11.1%	14.6%	73
Islam	16.0%	19.6%	98
Hinduism	4.9%	8.6%	43
Other religions	1.1%	-	-
No religion	17.6%	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	500

Table B.3: The questionnaire survey: sample size by housetype

Religion	HDB 1&2 room	HDB 3 room	HDB 4 room	HDB 5 room, executive & HUDC	Private flats & houses	Total
Chinese religion	37	85	61	17	28	228
Catholic	4	10	17	11	16	58
Other Christian	6	23	17	9	18	73
Islam	17	44	22	11	4	98
Hinduism	8	14	9	7	5	43
Total	72	176	126	55	71	500

for the private housing estates. While it was available for Clementi New Town in the Housing and Development Board's Area Office, it was classified as confidential. Hence, I set about constructing my own sampling frame, using the electoral list. All addresses in the relevant areas were included, except for those whose occupants were obviously Sikhs on the basis of their names (Singhs and Kaurs). These addresses were then divided into three lists, one Muslim, one Hindu and the last including Christians and Chinese religionists, comprising mainly Chinese but some Indians as well. The lists were constructed on the basis of the names listed under the addresses: Muslim and Hindu names were easy to identify; but because it was not as simple to distinguish Chinese religionists and Christians from the Chinese names, they were included in one list. Each of the three lists was then further sub-divided in terms of house type, and from each sub-list, a random sample of addresses was picked to make up the required numbers. When the field workers followed up the dwelling units sampled, any member of the household aged fifteen and above who was in at the time was approached as the respondent.

(C) PREPARING THE FIELD

The first step in preparing the field was a formal publicity "campaign" to catch the attention of potential respondents. This involved an open letter to residents informing them of the impending survey, the dates involved, a brief description of what it was about, how long each interview would last, and how to identify genuine interviewers. These were put up in prominent places at the bottom of each block of flats where possible. After the sample was chosen, copies of these letters were also distributed in the letter boxes of selected households.

(D) RECRUITING INTERVIEWERS

When it came to recruiting interviewers, the questions that confronted me was, who did I want to recruit, and who could I recruit? Essentially I had two options. The first was to recruit from within the area and community and therefore get people who already knew the area and probably some of the people. This had the potential of increasing response rates as Wallman et al. (1982) illustrated. The second was to simply recruit from outside the area and community.

My preference was to get people from within, and preferably people I knew who were reliable and who had some experience with conducting questionnaire surveys. I managed to identify some undergraduates at the local university who fulfilled these characteristics, but they did not make up the desired number of nine. I decided to make up the rest of the fieldwork team with undergraduates or recent graduates who had had some fieldwork experience but who lived elsewhere. Those from within the community eventually made up about half of the fieldforce (four) while those from without made up the other half (five). Although it was possible to recruit people from within the community whom I did not know by advertising at the local community centre, for instance, I was reluctant to do so while I had the option of undergraduates personally known to me because I would then have run the risk of attracting people whose reliability and commitment were questionable.

(E) PROFILE OF THE FIELD FORCE

A total of nine interviewers (including myself) were involved in administering the questionnaire, though they did not all contribute equally to the completion of the

survey. The field force consisted of young adults (aged between twenty and 26), and all interviewers were at least bilingual. All spoke English, and either Mandarin, Malay or Tamil. In addition, all the Chinese interviewers could speak another Chinese dialect, whether Cantonese, Hokkien, or Teochew. Table B.4 provides a summary profile of the field force in terms of religious affiliation, ethnic group and sex.

(F) TRAINING THE INTERVIEWERS

One initial joint session was conducted for all the eight interviewers. This was an introduction session, with the following objectives:

1. to explain the aims of the study;

2. to explain the broad stages of fieldwork involved (that is, the questionnaire survey; in-depth interviews; archival research; and interviews with state officials), even if not all the stages involved them;

3. to explain the aims of the questionnaire survey;

4. to set out the target (in terms of numbers and deadline);

5. to suggest how they should look out for potential second stage interviewees;

5. to suggest how they should introduce themselves and what identification material they should bring (a letter identifying them as part of the field force and their university identification cards);

6. to suggest the hours which are most likely to yield positive results (from about 4 pm to about 9.30 pm);

7. to familiarise them with the study area;

8. to go through the questionnaire;

9. to pair up interviewers; and

10. to give out addresses of respondents to be approached;

Table B.4: Profile of interviewers

Ethnic group	Religious Affiliation	Sex	Number
Malay	Muslim	Female	1
Indian	Hindu	Male	2
Chinese	Other Christian	Male	1
Chinese	Other Christian	Female	1
Chinese	Catholic	Female	1
Chinese	Non-religionist	Female	3

After this initial session, interviewers were told to go home, go through the questionnaire, and write down anything that they did not understand. They were encouraged to try the questionnaire on a few family members or friends, and if they came across any difficulty, they were to jot them down. Interviewers then came back for individual training sessions within the next five days where any doubts were cleared. Each also tried out the questionnaire on me which allowed me to ascertain that they were comfortable with the questionnaire.

(G) WORKING CONDITIONS FOR INTERVIEWERS

Interviewers worked in pairs, largely because the majority of them indicated from the point of recruitment that they would feel most comfortable working in this way. These were primarily the female interviewers who felt safer working in pairs. Hence, even though the strength of the field force was effectively halved because of the pairing, I thought it was worthwhile if they then felt more confident and comfortable.

Personally, I rotated among four partners: a non-religionist, a Muslim, and two Hindus. This was particularly useful in the case of the Muslims and the Hindus because while I wanted a feel of the attitudes of Hindus and Muslims to the survey, I could speak only a smattering of Malay and no Tamil. Hence, if I came across respondents who could speak only Malay or Tamil, I would have been stuck if not for the presence of the other interviewer. In fact, the Muslim and Hindu interviewers worked only with me, a Chinese, because it proved a satisfactory combination. Respondents seemed comfortable dealing with someone of their own faith, and at the same time, because there was a "novice" from outside their faith, they did not take

things for granted, were more explicit with explanations, and were less constrained by what was 'expected' of them.

In terms of matching interviewers and interviewees, the Hindu respondents were handled by the two Hindu interviewers who paired up with me. Similarly, the Muslim respondents were interviewed by the sole Muslim interviewer who worked throughout with me. While it was possible to identify from names in the sampling frame whether potential respondents were Muslim or Hindu, it was not possible to tell from the Chinese sample which were Catholic, "Other Christian" or Chinese religionist. As a result, all the Chinese interviewers handled all three groups.

Interviewers worked generally from about 4 pm to 9.30 pm though the precise times varied. These hours proved most satisfactory because most potential respondents were home after work. On the other hand, interviewing during the day would have meant covering a large number of housewives, retirees or the unemployed and missing out on many working people.

(H) FIELDWORK MANAGEMENT

I held an address list of all the addresses to be covered, and which pair of interviewers were to cover which addresses by what deadline. As they completed a set of questionnaires at the end of each day, the list was expanded to include the age and sex of those interviewed, so that as wide a spread of different age groups and a balance of both males and females could be assured. A list of negative responses was also kept, including a count of the number, the addresses, and the reasons why. Each negative response was replaced with another address for the pair of interviewers

to try. Interviewers were paid generally at the end of each week so that their transport costs could be covered, and the material incentive became real.

(I) DEBRIEFING

For those who worked independently (that is, those who did not pair up with me), a debriefing session was held with each pair of interviewers on the morning after every interview session. I felt this was necessary although it was time-consuming because it allowed me certain advantages. First, any problems which interviewers encountered could be cleared up before they proceeded with the next set of interviews. Second, it allowed me to check questionnaires for accuracy, completeness, legibility and so forth. If problems arose, they could be clarified on the spot, and if need be, interviewers could go back to the respondent that afternoon or evening. Third, I could gauge the attitude and commitment of the field workers and take some action to replace them if necessary. I was however fortunate in that those recruited were interested and responsible. Fourth, it also allowed them to talk away their disappointments, particularly on occasions when the negative response rate was high. More importantly, while giving them an opportunity to talk about their experiences, the discourse also became a source of qualitative data. For instance, interviewees reflected on the varied reactions of the different religious and class groups to appeals for co-operation; or on their own subjective impressions of the attitudes of different religious and class groups to religion. Finally, it also provided an important sense of which respondents would be potential second stage interviewees.

For those who worked with me, the "debriefing" was shorter and more immediate. There was no need to go through the questionnaire, and any problems

which the interviewers might have had could be cleared up immediately. The discussions with the "independent" field workers which were important in compounding my own impressions were in this instance less "formal" in that they took the form of reflections on the day's work on the way back from the study area to the university or home.

(I) FIELDWORK RESULTS

In view of the high refusal rate (37%) reported in a recent survey on religion conducted by the Research and Information Department of the Straits Times Press (Kuo and Quah, 1988:11), and in view of the potential sensitivity of the topic, I expected a low response rate. However, the overall response rate was indeed quite high. In all, 715 people were sampled in order for the target 500 to be attained; in other words, the response rate was 70.0%. The non-response of 215 persons was due to a variety of reasons as Table B.5 illustrates.

In terms of refusals according to religious groups, the spread was extremely even, except for the group of "Other Christians" who registered a higher than average refusal rate, as Table B.6 illustrates, possibly because many from the independent churches were unwilling to participate. This, in turn, was probably because they felt that an accusing finger was being pointed at them by the state for engaging in too persistent and insensitive proselytisation, and they thought it prudent to "lie low". This was the feeling that I got while approaching them, and it was what the other field workers felt they encountered as well.

Table B.5: Reasons for non-response

Reason	Number	Percentage
Refusal	121	16.9%
No religion	70	9.8%
Other religion	3	0.4%
Not in	21	2.9%
Total	215	30.0%

Table B.6: Religious profile of non-respondents

Religion	Total number approached	Refusals
Chinese religion	281	53 (18.9%)
Catholic	71	13 (18.3%)
Other Christian	95	22 (23.2%)
Islam	121	23 (19.0%)
Hinduism	53	10 (18.9%)
Total	621	121 (19.5%)

(K) DATA PROCESSING

The questionnaires were checked during the debriefing sessions and interviewers went back to clarify points if necessary. Once complete, answers were coded onto coding sheets and then key-punched into the computer. The data was then cleaned, after which Minitab was used to generate frequency counts and cross-tabulations.

APPENDIX C: PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

All names in the following list are pseudonyms.

Name	Religion	Ethnic group	Sex	Age	Occupation	Level of participation*
Karen	Catholic	Chinese	F	50	Housewife	Active
Joan	Catholic	Chinese	F	24	Research assistant	Not active
Joseph	Catholic	Chinese	M	58	Teacher	Active
Magdalene	Catholic	Chinese	F	62	Housewife	Active
Pauline	Catholic	Indian	F	61	Housewife	Active
Reverend Vuyk	Catholic	Caucasian	M	52	Priest	-
Anne	Other Christian	Chinese	F	29	Teacher	Active
Cheng	Other Christian	Chinese	M	22	Undergraduate	Moderately Active
Wen Mei	Other Christian	Chinese	F	20	Student	Not active
Reverend Lim	Other Christian	Chinese	M	40	Pastor	-
Zakir	Muslim	Malay	M	50	Teacher	Not active
Kartini	Muslim	Arab	F	23	Undergraduate	Not active
Mustapha	Muslim	Malay	M	62	Retiree	Very active
Soo Ling	Syncretic Chinese religionist	Chinese	F	21	Clerk	Not active
Mr Tan	Syncretic Chinese religionist	Chinese	M	66	Retiree	Not active
Hock Lim	Buddhist	Chinese	M	22	Undergraduate	Active
Eng Teng	Buddhist	Chinese	M	30	Assistant Librarian	Very active
Venerable Sangye	Buddhist	Caucasian	F	42	Nun	-

Name	Religion	Ethnic group	Sex	Age	Occupation	Level of participation*
Chandran	Hindu	Indian	M	60	Retiree	Very active
Mrs Nair	Hindu	Indian	F	49	Teacher	Not active
Prema	Hindu	Indian	F	32	Banker	Not active
Kumar	Hindu	Indian	M	25	Unemployed	Not active
Subramaniam	Hindu	Indian	M	56	Priest	-

* This refers to the level of participation in church/temple/mosque activities outside of regular worship.

APPENDIX D: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SELECTED INDIVIDUALS

In the case of the lay interviewees, all interviews were conducted in their respective homes, with the exception of three. Two of these preferred to come to my office at the local university because of a lack of privacy and quiet at home. In the case of a Hindu respondent, I visited him at his regular temple since he was there all day everyday. The interviews with the religious functionaries were either conducted at the religious place or at their offices.

The interviewees were either selected personally by me or by my field workers during the administration of the questionnaire. In the former instance, I merely went back and made further arrangements for interviews. In the latter instance, the field workers involved would introduce me to the interviewees, and I would then make arrangements with them for subsequent sessions.

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I had a set of issues which I wanted to cover. These were jotted down as an aide memoire (Appendix E), but they were not posed to interviewees in the precise order in which they were jotted down, nor was the manner in which the issues were raised always exactly the same. Some may argue that by preparing a set of issues for discussion, the researcher determines the agenda and sets the direction. The interviewee does not then talk about what is of importance to him/her. However, as many have pointed out, totally "unstructured" and "non-directive" interviews are not only undesired, there is in reality no such thing (Burgess, 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Jones, 1985; and Eyles, 1986). To quote Jones (1985:47):

> There is no such thing as presuppositionless research. In preparing for interviews researchers will have, and should have, some broad questions in mind, and the more interviews they do and the more patterns they

> see in the data, the more they are likely to use this grounded understanding to want to explore in certain directions rather than others.

Certainly, I found through this study that the issues raised by one interviewee often provided some direction for exploration with subsequent interviewees.

In the interviewing process, there were some general principles which I followed. I started interview sessions with descriptive matters, and consciously kept away from evaluative topics. Usually this meant starting by getting interviewees to talk about their religious practices and rituals, the festivals they celebrated and how. Interviewees were also led to talk about their religious background. A constant effort was made to make the interviewee feel at ease and to establish trust and rapport. This was done by being an active listener through expressing interest and using encouraging gestures for example.

During the course of interviews, several techniques were used. Projective techniques (Walker, 1985:6-7) proved particularly useful in eliciting responses. For example, photographs would be shown to interviewees to encourage comments (for example, Plate D.1). Newspaper articles were also presented to them and discussions often took off from the views expressed in the articles (for example, Figure D.1). Interviewees would also be asked hypothetical questions (What would you do if....); or they would be asked to talk not about themselves or their own feelings, but about other people and their presumed feelings or about imaginary situations. In this way, they would "project" their own beliefs and feelings. At the same time, interviewees would be posed devil advocate's questions whereby an opposing viewpoint is presented, to which interviewees respond. From the responses it was then possible to discover their personal positions.

Plate D.1 Tourist souvenir trade in Thian Hock Keng

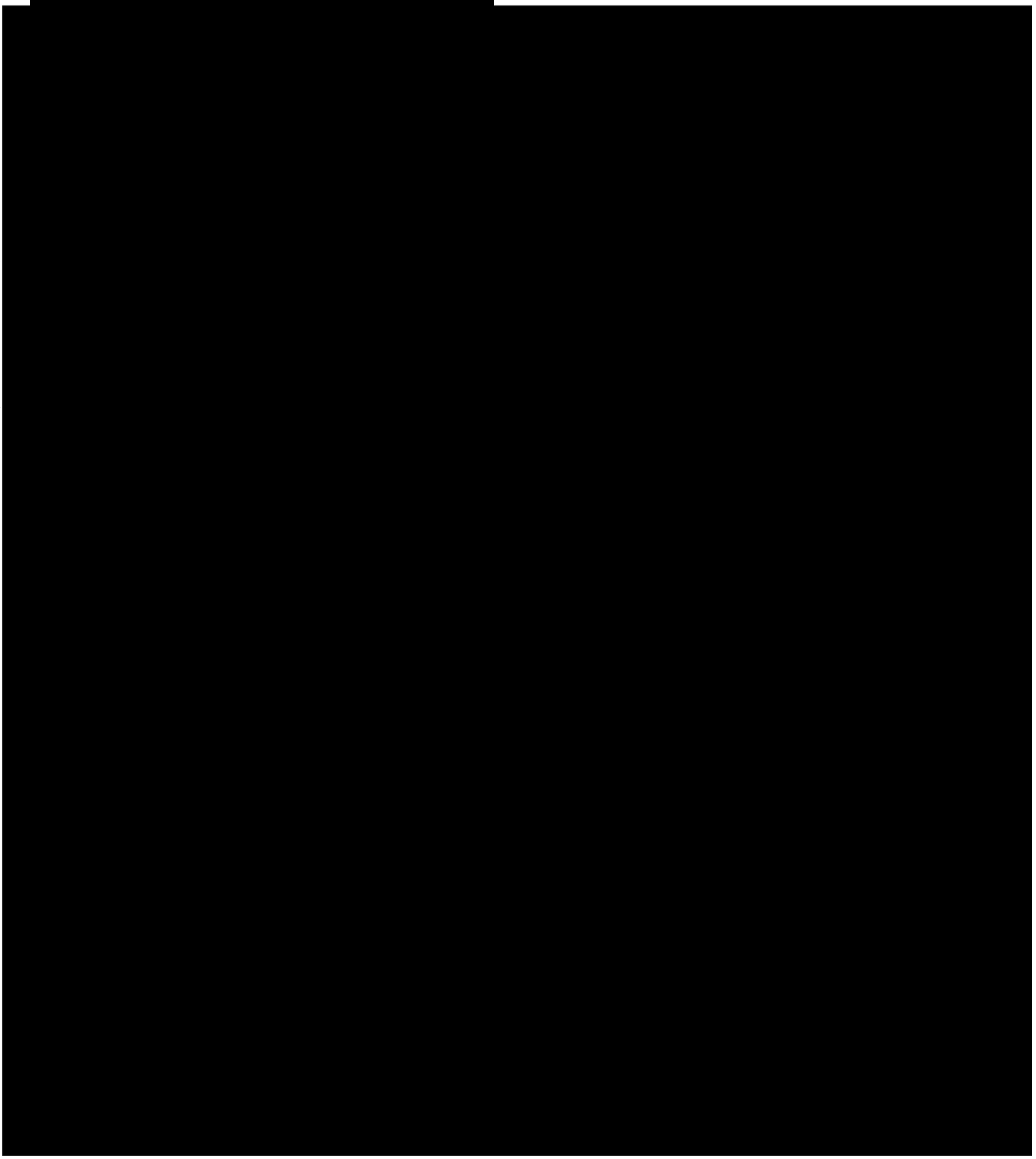

Figure D.1: Newspaper articles used during in-depth interviews

At the end of the interview sessions when I began to round up, I usually offered interpretations so that informants could confirm or contradict with counter-information. I inevitably ended with casual talk though this was not a conscious move. In retrospect, it had the effect of making sure that the interviewee had not been brought to the point at which he/she had just recounted highly emotionally loaded experiences. I thus operated with these general principles in mind, while maintaining a flexibility so that new directions could be followed up and new ideas developed. In this manner, the interview sessions can be described as "flexible but also controlled" (Burgess, 1982:107).

APPENDIX E: AIDE MEMOIRE FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

(A) PRELIMINARIES: RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

1. Family background

a) Establish "religious childhood" -- what was it like?

b) Conversion -- if so, why and how?

c) Importance of religion within family: for example, what sort of practices and rituals; what festivals and how celebrated?

2. School

a) Mission or government school?

b) What sort of formal religious education?

c) Role of religion in school

3. Participation in religious activities

a) (Follow up from questionnaire) What activities?

b) How active?

c) What motivations?

(B) PLACES OF WORSHIP

1. Establishing places at which people "pray"

a) Home -- private prayers, prayer groups, house churches and temples?

b) Public places -- roadsides, below trees, along roads (processions), grottoes etc

c) Religious buildings -- churches, mosques, temples

2. Functions of religious buildings

a) What are the activities carried out in churches, mosques and temples? (solely religious or secular as well?)

b) What activities do interviewees participate in?

c) Establish other meanings: social ...?

3. Place sacredness

a) Are places at which religious activties take place also sacred? (Go through each place)

b) What does "sacredness"; "sacred experience"; and "sacred place" mean to people? What contributes to each?

c) What sort of experience/feelings do you get when you walk into a church/temple/mosque?

4. Place attachment

a) Is there a sense of attachment to the church/mosque/temple?

b) Hypothetical situation: if you had to leave, or your religious building had to be demolished or relocated, what would your feelings be? (Use newspaper cuttings)

5. Religious places and activities as tourist attractions

Solicit views on this, setting it in the context of tourism development in Singapore (Use photographs).

(C) OTHER RELIGIOUS PLACES AND ACTIVITIES

a) Establish participation in activities -- either directly (eg, a Hindu praying at a Chinese temple) or indirectly, by celebrating festivals together with friends and neighbours)

b) Establish knowledge and understanding of other religions -- either active search to understand and know (conscious effort to read about them or to visit other religious places); or passive understanding.

(D) RELIGION AND STATE POLICIES

What are the views on

a) Allocation of land

b) Demolition

c) Mediation by religious hierarchy

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